

# Raritan's Finest Hour

"The Story of Raritan  
During World War II"



By Bruce Doorly  
With historical consultants  
John Pacifico and Peter Vitelli

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## On The Cover

1945



Today



# Raritan's Finest Hour

"The Story of Raritan During World War II"

By Bruce Doorly

With historical consultants John Pacifico and Peter Vitelli

Edited by Bob McClement

This Book is dedicated to those in  
Raritan who served in the  
ultimate battle of good verses evil.



The above "Star Board" is shown here early in 1945. This was on Somerset Street where the Post Office is today. The 852 is the number of Raritan residents that had joined the service in World War II. By the end of the war, the count would be over 900. The priest (in black) is Father Russo of St. Ann's Church.

## Introduction—Raritan 1941

Today the town of Raritan's identity is defined by its World War II hero, John Basilone. He was awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal and later The Navy Cross at Iwo Jima, where he died in battle. The annual parade in his honor, now held for over 30 years, is the town's premier event and has been attended by thousands over the years. John Basilone's story is just a part of what Raritan's World War II citizen soldiers did for their country. Raritan overall had an amazing war record - both on the battlefield and on the homefront.

During World War II, Raritan had a large percentage of their men and women serving in the military. This was an Italian-American community; many who served had parents that were not born in this country but rather in Italy - a country who (reluctantly) was initially on the side of Nazi Germany. These Raritan residents valued the freedom and opportunity that this country had given them. These freedoms and opportunities were not available in the Italy their family had left. When called to protect their new way of life in the U.S., they did not hesitate to answer the call to duty.

\*By the end of the war, over 900 men and women from Raritan's population of 5000 served their country. Some in Raritan were so anxious to serve that they lied about their age in order to enlist. One 14-year-old and one 39-year-old managed to sneak into the service - for a while at least.

Proudly many families had several sons in the military. One family, the Del Rocco family, had five.

On the homefront, Raritan tavern owner Tony Orlando organized the sending of hundreds of morale boosting packages and thousands of letters to our boys overseas. He also made his local tavern a tribute to the fighting men by posting hundreds of pictures on the wall of our local heroes.

At the end of the war one Raritan soldier, Robert Krachun, served as a guard at The Nuremberg Trials where he appeared in a famous war photograph. At times, he personally guarded the highest-ranking surviving Nazi - Hermann Goring.

The small town of Raritan had 24 men make the ultimate sacrifice in World War II. One, Rowland Koskamp, was a Pastor from a Raritan church.

Many Raritan men were awarded military honors for their service. 23 Raritan men were awarded *The Bronze Star* and 3 *The Silver Star*.

The outcome that would have resulted if we had lost this war is almost unimaginable. Defeat would have ushered in a dark era of brutal oppression. Oppressors control everything - and severely punish any resistance. They ruin the present for all but themselves and destroy all hope of a better future. But thanks to The Greatest Generation - which was made up of towns like Raritan - we avoided that terrible fate. This book salutes the men and women who fought to make our way of life possible today.

This book puts a local focus on the war in the hope that the younger generation may be able to relate to it. A World War II documentary on The History Channel can be interesting, but it too often has no direct relationship to today. To a teenager, a story about an evil empire taking over many countries - killing millions of men, women, and children in the process - probably sounds like an upcoming movie or a video game where you could fire back at the bad guys and rack up an impressive score. But World War II was all so very real. The men who died lived right down the street. Some of the brave (now very old) men who fought can still be seen around town. The victory in the war gave today's younger generation their freedoms and standard of living. Most (or perhaps better stated "all") of it is now taken for granted.

A quick flip through this book shows that most pages are paired-up. On the left side is the written story, which this author hopes you find interesting and inspiring. On the right side are the photos and other visuals which makes this a good "coffee table" book that can be "flipped through" - (over and over, of course). The first half of the book follows a chronology as it tells of how the town readied for war. The second half of the book has many "war stories" that stand on their own with no specific sequence.

When looking through Raritan's local newspaper *The Raritan Valley News* from the World War II years 1941-45 much is familiar. Some of the ads are for businesses that we know today. The names in the articles about our boys fighting the war include DeCicco, Foohey, Laggini, Soriano, Salerno, and Memoli. Names that, decades later, and even today, play a role in the democratic government of this small patriotic town. However these names in 1942 were not found working in the government, but fighting to preserve this free and democratic government.

Also around the town of Raritan in the 1940s could be found the names Basilone and Frelinghuysen. Not as a park or a street as they are today, but as real people - who along with the rest of the town - were united in a fight for freedom against evil empires whose goal was global domination.

Some Raritan stores that we know today were there in the 1940s but they had a few differences. In the 1940s one could stop to get food at DeLucia's at 7 First Avenue, but it was not that great pizza from their brick oven. While they did use that same brick oven that they have today, it was then DeLucia's "Bakery", serving bread and other bakery products.

\* That high percentage would be close to impossible if the age ranges were evenly distributed. But the immigration trends into Raritan were such that many young people arrived here around 1910-1920 and then began large families. By the early 1940s, a disproportionate number of men and women were in the 18-35 age range. As stated, it was not just men who served but approximately 50 women served as well.

# Prominent Raritan Residents at the Start of WWII - 1941



**James Del Monte**  
President of Board of Commissioners  
(Mayor)



**Peter Mencaroni**  
Board of Commissioners



**Andrew Sabol**  
Board of Commissioners



**Nick Esposito**  
Town Clerk for over 20 years.



**George Allgair**  
Town Counsel



**Tony Orlando**  
Tavern Owner



**Warren Glaser**  
Newspaper Owner of Raritan Valley News



**Dominic Soriano**  
Postmaster



**Lorenzo Rossi**  
Police Chief  
He had his own style of justice



**Andrew Babey**  
policeman



**Ralph "Johnson the Cop" Petrone**



**Reverend Rowland Koskamp**  
Third Reformed Church



**Father Olsovsky**  
St. Joe's



**Father Russo**  
St. Ann's



**Aerial View of Raritan in 1941**

Like today, Raritan residents could stop in for a beer and socialize with others at 10 Anderson Street. It was not called DeCicco's Tavern as it is today, but The Anderson Tavern, although the DeCicco family did own the tavern. Ballantine and Stagmeirs were then the most popular beers.

For special purchases, Tropiano's was on Somerset Street. But it was at a different location with different products. There was not jewelry, but appliances.

Starting in 1944 the Bongiovis handled the funerals in Raritan, but they were known as The Conroy-Bongiovi Funeral Home. They were not in their present location — they were at 31 Somerset Street. But the location was somewhat unimportant as the “viewings” of our deceased loved ones in the 1940s were held in the home.

In the 1940s Raritan was an Italian-American community. Italian was spoken in many homes and was often heard on the streets, and, at times, even in church. The Italian immigration to America had its peak years from 1880-1920. Italians were looking to escape the poor economic conditions of Italy. When they arrived in the U.S. they moved into communities where others Italian-Americans were living. Raritan became one of these towns. The characteristics of their communities were close family ties, dedication to the Catholic Church, and community involvement. They looked to help new Italian immigrants get established in the country by setting up aid societies.

These immigrants brought some of their traditions and fiestas to this country — such as the feast of St. Rocco. By 1920 the Italians had become the majority in Raritan and with that majority came the votes to elect their own.

Locally and throughout the country, in 1941, there was a sense of optimism about the economy which had long suffered throughout the depression of the 1930s. Jobs were returning. The two largest local employers were the Johns-Manville plant in Manville and Calco Pharmaceuticals which was on the border of Bound Brook and Bridgewater. Thousands of local people would work for decades at these plants.

Mid-year, Calco had experienced some labor trouble resulting in a twelve-day strike. However, the strike was ended when the A.F.L. labor union president issued a statement that workers needed to return “in the interests of national defense.”

The town of Raritan seemed content with the state of things as all members of the Raritan's then governing body “The Board of Commissioners” were running for re-election un-opposed. No one seemed to feel a need to run against them.

The local movie theatre, which had closed in the depression days of the mid-1930s, had re-opened in April. The local fire hall, which was also used as the municipal building, had renovations done. A large prison cell which had been used for holding the occasional prisoner had been moved to the back of the building and made smaller. This freed-up space was converted to a conference room for the board of commissioners and an office for town clerk Nick Esposito. The building's interior and exterior were also painted. All windows received new shades. This was the first time in 18 years that the town had the money to fix up the building.

A few miles away saw more social progress as the Solberg Airport opened in Readington. It was a 370-acre site with two runways.

Unfortunately, the optimism of the economy was offset by the darkening of war clouds. The war seemed to get closer to Raritan and the U.S. each day. Local boys were now being drafted as the first peacetime draft in the country's history had been put in place earlier in the year.

The local plants at Johns Manville and Calco Pharmaceuticals were gearing up for war production. Nationally the newspapers and radio news had been bombarding the public since 1938 with the ongoing war in Europe and the Pacific. The U.S. had just taken its first step toward war, as it had occupied Iceland to deter German expansion. The public seemed to take this in stride.

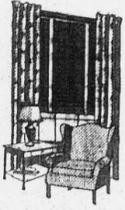
In 1941 Raritan held its 41st annual St. Rocco Celebration — a tradition in an Italian community. The whole town gathered together in this. While most people in town knew each other this event gave residents who did not know each other an opportunity to “meet their neighbor.” The celebration started with the statue of St. Rocco being paraded through the streets of Raritan. The St. Rocco Celebration was a week long event that concluded with a carnival held off Old York road near where Meehan Avenue and Weiss Terrace is today. (Those streets did not exist back then.) The finale was an elaborate fireworks display that started at midnight and lasted over an hour. The attendance of 20,000 at the fireworks in 1941 was one of the largest they ever had.

Back in 1941, Raritan had four Italian Aid Societies. These functioned as both help for new residents that came from Italy and as a social club—providing a place to play cards on a Friday Night. There was:

- La Fratellanza (The Brotherhood) Society who had their building on the corner of First Ave. and Second Street. (48 1st Ave) This was for Italians from Northern Italy—the Bologna Venice Area.
- Stella D' Italia (Star of Italy) —their building (which is now gone) was at 57 Anderson Street next to where the St. Ann's Rectory is now. This was for Italians from the Naples, Benevento area, (Neapolitans).
- St. Rocco Mutual Aid Society — they used the second floor at 23 Anderson Street. That was above the movie theatre. *Frame Me* is now in that location. This was for Italians from the Leonia Area.

**During World War II, Raritan residents could find all the goods they needed within walking distance. Most families did not even have a car. There were many (mom and pop) grocery stores, bakeries, taverns, a hardware store, department stores, banks, funeral homes, a banquet hall, and even a movie theater. Here are ads from the WWII era.**

**Venetian Blinds**  
by  
*Columbia*



MEANS YOU HAVE THE BEST

**S. GLASER & SONS**  
59 THOMPSON STREET  
RARITAN, N. J.  
Phone 968-R

Better Buys in Better Foods

**SORIANO'S FOOD MARKET**  
Free Delivery—Tel. Som. 657  
11 W. SOMERSET ST. RARITAN, N. J.  
(Opp. Third Reformed Church)

**PARK GRILL**  
Choice  
WINES — LIQUORS — BEER  
ROCCO MIELE, Prop.  
75 Somerset St. Raritan

**The PLAYHOUSE**  
ANDERSON STREET, RARITAN, N. J.

AIR-CONDITIONED Phone Som. 2020  
Matinee Wednesday, Saturday, Holidays  
Sunday Continuous

FRIDAY and SATURDAY—SEPT. 1 and 2

**GET HAPPY!**



**SPECIAL**  
Matinee Friday  
Saturday Matinee  
As Usual

Companion Feature  
Kay Francis, Martha  
Raye, Carole Landis,  
Mitzie Mayfair  
in  
**"FOUR JILLS  
IN A JEEP"**

Great DISNEY STORY  
AND THE SEVEN DWARFS  
DISTRIBUTED BY M.G.M. PICTURES, INC.

**THE RARITAN LIQUOR STORE**  
*Wishes Its Patrons and Friends*  
**A Merry Christmas**

**PALACE GREENHOUSES**  
Flowers For All Occasions  
JOHN AZUD—Florist  
ROUTE 29 and 2nd AVE. RARITAN, N. J.  
Tel. Somerville 1782

**RARITAN VALLEY HARDWARE**  
1 W. SOMERSET ST. RARITAN, N. J.

**ROCCO FRANCHINO**  
Now Trading As  
**VICTORY DAIRY**  
Pasteurized Dairy Products  
**"DO YOUR BIT" — BY — "KEEPING FIT"**  
DRINK MILK  
FOR THAT EXTRA WAR ENERGY  
Call Som. 812-W 23 Victoria Street, Raritan, N. J.

START financing  
your 1942 vacation now with a  
savings account at this bank.

Entrust Your Savings  
to a  
Mutual Savings Bank

**Raritan Savings Bank**  
RARITAN, N. J.  
Member Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

Call 646

**HANNON**  
FUNERAL HOME

The SERVICE . . .  
. . . of the Director covers a  
hundred items: Obtaining  
Permits and Legal  
Papers, Preparation, Ar-  
rangements, The Tribute  
itself and very many  
more.

43 WEST  
SOMERSET ST.  
RARITAN



HERMAN H. HANNON, C.F.E.



**CONROY FUNERAL HOME**  
ROUNDBROOK, N.J.  
TEL. SOMERSET 89

**CONROY BONGIACCI**  
FUNERAL HOME  
RARITAN, N. J.  
SOMERSET 200

FOR COMPLETE FUNERAL SERVICE  
CALL

- Marchigianni (People from March) Their hall was on Second Street two houses from where *Espos* is. This was for Italians from the “March” area southeast of Rome.

Raritan was a close-knit town with dozens of guys named Tony and Frank. So it was ripe for nicknames. Around town could be found John “Sonny” Tozzi, James “Shorty” Stramaglia, Tony “Lemon Ice” D’Amato, Vincent “Totti” Gattone, Alphonse “Murph” Stabile, Albert “Chicky” Laggini, (and this author’s favorite) Frank “Peppers & Eggs” Papera, and Arthur “Lucky” Tropiano, The owner of the gas station on Somerset Street was Angelo “MoonBeam” Sena. Even some of the women had nicknames such as Louise “Lu-Lu” De Luca.

It was a town relatively free of crime. Most people did not even lock their doors when they went out. Some of this could be attributed to colorful Police Chief Lorenzo Rossi. His nickname was “Renzi”. He was a police officer of his era who had his own brand of justice which locals called “Renzi’s Law”. Residents credit him with making Raritan a safe place to live. He set any potential juvenile delinquents on the right path through his strong-arm tactics.

This was an era were kids spent good portions of the day outside unsupervised, so the opportunity for trouble was always present. But since they knew that they would have to deal with Police Chief Rossi, those troublemakers thought twice. John Pacifico recalled

*“If a kid or kids did something bad and a resident complained Chief Rossi was then summoned. On the spot he would assess the situation with the deviants and the witnesses and either bring the kid to their parents or give the troublemaker a stern warning not to do it again. Seldom was any teenager arrested or taken to court at a later date. The issue was dealt with on the spot. And sometimes that meant literally a swift kick in the butt which was acceptable back then.”*

The parents liked Rossi — they were very appreciative of him. In the old days, after Rossi brought the kid home, the parents would often then deliver their own punishment and that sometimes meant that junior might have trouble sitting for the next few days.

Raritan’s Peter Vitelli, who grew up in the Rossi era, recalled

*“Lorenzo Rossi ruled with an iron hand, but not for personal gain. He cared about the people, especially the kids. He was beloved by the people and well-respected.”*

In the close-knit Italian-American community of Raritan, people looked after one another. A good example of this was seen in March of 1943 when a man tried to rob *Zaninelli’s Store* on Somerset Street. Staffing the store alone that day was 21-year-old Rose Zaninelli, the owner’s daughter. The would-be-robber foolishly calculated that this young woman would be an easy target. He came to the counter and demanded all of the money in the cash register. Rose, well prepared, took out a hammer which she banged hard against the wall. The would be robber was so startled that he forgot all about the cash register and ran as fast as he could out of the store. Ray Soriano, the grocer next door, quickly came to *Zaninellis* to see what was the matter. When told of the robbery attempt, Ray ran out the store and managed to catch the robber and hold him for the Police. When the local newspaper asked Rose how the robbery ended, she said “Mr. Soriano gave the man an awful beating.” When asked for his version of the story, Ray Soriano simply said he didn’t want any publicity and let it go at that.

Raritan was a self-contained town. Almost all of the goods and services one needed could be found within walking distance—and these goods and services were provided by businesses owned by the local residents. There were grocery stores, department stores, banks, a banquet hall and even a movie theatre.

Many in Raritan were related. For some the family ties had its origin back in Italy. For others it was thru marriage between two Raritan residents—that happened quite often. Therefore many people had several cousins and in-laws in town. If you lived in Raritan back then you were related to many other people in town. As for the people you were not related to—after the next wedding you just might be related.

\* Lorenzo “Renzi” Rossi joined the force in 1923 and became Chief in in 1937 — a position he would hold for the next 30 years.

# Around Town in the 1940s



The Hudak grocery was one of many “Mom and Pop” grocery stores in Raritan.



This photo is of a patriotic parade on Somerset Street. *The Raritan Woolen Mills* can be seen in the background.



“Moonbeam” Sena owned this gas station on Somerset Street. The Shell Station is there today.



*Carlino's* had ice cream, soda, and comic books.



Joe Pinto with his delivery truck for The Raritan Liquor Store.



Raritan's *Candy Kitchen* had a small fire in this 1940s picture. Note—the post office was next door to it. A hair place and shoe repair are there today.

## The Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor stuns the U.S.

December 7th, 1941 was a clear, sunny, yet cold afternoon in Raritan, New Jersey. The previous day's weather was unseasonably warm, in the 50s, but on this Sunday, winter had begun. It would be a high of just 34 degrees — seven degrees lower than the usual average temperature. That morning in the small patriotic town of Raritan many would attend church. *The Church of St. Ann* held 4 masses. *St. Bernard's Church* held three.

On that day playing at Raritan's local movie theatre, *The Raritan Playhouse*, which was on Anderson Street, was *Life Begins for Andy Hardy*. It featured two young stars of the era — Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. The other local movie theatre back in 1941 was *The Cort Theatre* in Somerville—which was located across from the court house. That afternoon at *The Cort Theatre* Clark Gable and Lana Turner starred in the movie *Honky Tonk*. Nationally, Disney's *Dumbo*, was the most popular movie of the day. The top song of the week was by the top band of the era. It was "Chattanooga Choo Choo" by the Glenn Miller Orchestra. That Sunday was the final day of the National Football League's regular season.

Those reading *The New York Times* on Sunday morning of December 7th, 1941, saw the possibility of war right on the front page. The top headline read "Roosevelt Appeals to Hirohito." (Hirohito was the Emperor of Japan.) Also on the front page was another article giving false reassurance to the American people. The headline read "Navy is Superior to Any, Says Knox". This article was about a newly-released Navy report from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. It stated. "I am proud to report that the American people may feel fully confident in their Navy. In my opinion, the loyalty, morale, and technical ability of the personnel are without superior."

Others who read the local paper *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* that Friday, Dec 5th, may have read an editorial that stated that we may be at war with Japan in a few days.

### SMG Editorial Dec. 5th, 1941 — The Prospect of War

The attitude of the people of the United States, in regard to the war with Japan, is truly amazing. It is readily admitted by almost everyone that we might be at war with Japan within a few days. There is as much as a 50-50 chance. Yet no one seems to give it a second thought. There is Christmas shopping to be done. We are confident that our Navy is strong enough to keep the Japanese occupied in foreign waters. The greatest and most tragic mistake made by happy people, however have been to decide that wars would be short and easy. ... Japan looks like a soft touch now, but we wonder how things will seem a year from now if we are involved in a war.

## Raritan Residents Recall The Day of Infamy

On December 7th, 1941 Raritan residents were attending to their usual Sunday routine. Many, after going to church, settled in with family or went to the movies. Anyone old enough to remember can recall where they were when they heard the news that the Japanese had attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor.

Ann Navatto recalled that that Sunday had started out like most Sundays. Their home at 4 W. Somerset Street (where she still lives today) was the hub of the family. As was often the case, friends and family were over playing cards. The radio was on when they heard the announcement about the Japanese bombing the U.S. at Pearl Harbor—a place they were not familiar with. So they pulled out some maps to see where Pearl Harbor was. Most of those present sat in bewilderment, but Ann remembers her mother was hysterical. Home that afternoon was her brother, Albert, who was already in the army. He was due to return to the base at McGuire later that night. But he quickly contacted his fellow army buddy who was due to drive them back that night and they agreed to return to the base immediately.

James Sorace, who would later own the *J&J Barbershop* on Somerset Street in Raritan, was 17. He went to New York City to see The Woody Herman Orchestra at The Strand Theatre. In the middle of the concert, the music stopped and an announcer said that the U.S had just been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor—and that sailors from a Navy ship that was docked in the New York Harbor would need to report back to their ship immediately. The band then resumed playing to the stunned crowd.

# Dec 7th, 1941—Pearl Harbor Day

## Raritan Residents Recall The Day of Infamy

At 2:30 PM the radio networks broke the news to the stunned American homefront.



**James Sorace**

Was at a big band concert in New York City. The concert was interrupted and an announcer informed the crowd of the attack. All military men present were told to go back to their base.



**Ann Navatto**

Remembers that the “day of infamy” started off as a nice Sunday afternoon with family.



**Tony Hudak**

Like many Americans, the Hudak family, which was gathered together that Sunday, wondered where Pearl Harbor was.



**Anthony DeCicco**

The DeCicco family knew exactly where Pearl Harbor was as their son Michael DeCicco was stationed there.



The *Somerset Messenger Gazette* editorials during the World War II years were written by President C. Palmer Bateman and Editors G. Wallace Conover and C. Stewart Hoagland.

### **Somerset Messenger Gazette** Editorial -Dec 9th, 1941 *War With Japan*

It is doubtful if Japan could have begun her war with the United States in a way better designed to arouse and unite our people. This announced brutal attack on a territory of the United States decided for us the course we must adopt—heavy, effective retribution at a favorable time. We expected nothing better from a member of the Axis. Whatever advantage they may have been gained from this partial surprise will be lost in the fury of the reaction in America. We have been plunged into war ... we must hit and hit hard, with everything we have.

### **Somerset Messenger Gazette** Editorial—Dec 19th, 1941 *One Good Thing*

Most of us have taken our country for granted during the past 20 years or so. Many millions of us have gotten around to a point where we wonder what our country is going to do for us next, rather than what we are going to do for our country. Organized labor, the unemployed, farmers, veterans, and others have many reasons why the United States should extend a hand towards them.

But now most of us are on the giving end. Our recruiting stations have been swamped since Pearl Harbor. Thousands of us are giving an impressive amount of time to spotting airplanes, fire and police reserves are being trained. Air raid wardens are being organized. Auxiliary nursing services are being formed. America is swinging into action. There are not many good sides to war, but this is one of them.

Former Raritan Councilman and Mayor Anthony Hudak recalled that after attending church at St. Joes his family went to his grandparent's house at 91 W. Somerset Street. Many aunts and uncles also attended this traditional Sunday afternoon family get-together. While listening to the radio that afternoon, a special bulletin interrupted to announce that the U.S. had been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. Since some initial news bulletins did not say Hawaii, there was confusion and debate among the family. They, like many in the U.S., were wondering, where (and what) is Pearl Harbor? As more radio reports came in the next hour, it was learned that Pearl Harbor was a naval base in Hawaii.

At 10 Anderson Street in Raritan, where the DeCiccos lived, there was no doubt about where and what Pearl Harbor was for their son Michael was stationed at Pearl Harbor. He was enlisted in the Navy, serving aboard *The Helena* which was then docked at Pearl Harbor. A 7-year-old Anthony DeCicco, who would later serve as Raritan's Mayor, recalled his mother and his two sisters crying as the ongoing radio reports were bringing to light the gravity of the losses that the U.S. had suffered. The fate of Michael was unknown and would not be known for days.

On the Battlefront at Pearl Harbor serving in the Navy on Sunday December 7th, 1941, was Raritan's Michael DeCicco. His ship was *The Helena*—a Navy Destroyer which was docked at what was called the "1010 Harbor". It was across from "battleship row" — where the US Navy's largest battleships were docked. It was 7:55 AM.

Michael DeCicco was setting up chairs for a church service on the deck of his ship. He observed many planes approaching at an unusually low attitude. As they came close by, he saw a red circle on the side of each aircraft. This symbol was unmistakably "The Rising Sun" which belonged to Japan. He immediately realized what this meant. Within three minutes of the first Japanese bomb exploding, the attack came his way. One enemy plane released a torpedo aimed at *The Oglala*, an old mine layer, that was docked in front of *The Helena*. Most ships were docked two-deep at Pearl Harbor. The torpedo went under the bottom of the smaller *Oglala* and hit the engine room of *The Helena*, killing 20 engineers and electricians. One engine room and one boiler room were flooded. Some wiring was severed—cutting power to some of the guns. The sailors immediately responded by closing the watertight doors and hatches throughout the flooded areas. This kept the ship afloat. An additional generator was started and power was soon restored to all guns. The debris that broke apart from the two ships now covered the dock. But quickly Michael DeCicco and the other crew members started to fight back, firing the anti-aircraft guns at the Japanese planes. Michael helped to ready the ammunition that was being fired at the attacking aircraft. The attacking enemy aircraft fired back, inflicting more casualties on *The Helena* sailors. Michael saw one man that was running to his battle-station blown to pieces by shrapnel from a bomb. Several Japanese planes flew toward *The Helena*, but when they saw the intense anti-aircraft fire many of the planes turned away. One plane did come within several feet of the ship. Michael Decicco recalled "One of the planes swooped down so close and a little yellow belly leaned over the cockpit and grinned at us."

There were many challenges during the battle. The initial torpedo blast on *The Helena* was so great that it burst the seams of the ship next to it, *The Oglala*. Thus, that ship started listing heavily and her signal flags drooped over *The Helena*'s bridge. Sailors responded by getting a tug boat to clear the listing ship away so it would not interfere with the anti-aircraft fire.

*The Helena* would shoot down at least one Japanese plane and perhaps as many as three. In the confusion of battle it is hard to determine exactly which ship fired which shot. Michael summed up the battle "If we'd only had a couple of minutes notice we could have done a lot better. They caught us with our pants down." Even though they were surprised, the sailors fought well. They would be later commended by Navy Secretary, Frank Knox who felt their intense and immediate counterattack saved a battleship. While the attack lasted just under 2 hours, the sailors at Pearl Harbor would stay on watch all evening and through the night. But the Japanese never returned. Their planes had withdrawn to their aircraft carriers. While the Japanese were —at the moment — the proud winners of the surprise attack, by the end of the war, every Japanese ship that participated in the Pearl Harbor attack would be sent to the bottom of the ocean. *The Helena* was soon repaired and the crew along with Raritan's Michael DeCicco would return to battle the Japanese again at Guadalcanal and other battles.

# Raritan's Michael DeCicco was at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7th, 1941. He help fight off the Japanese attack.

## FIRST SAILOR BACK FROM PEARL HARBOR TELLS HOW MATES FOUGHT OFF SWARMING JAP PLANES

Certain specific information is purposely omitted from the story which follows in line with wartime practices of the press. The name "U. S. S. Raritan" has been substituted to mask the identity of the ship principally mentioned.—Editor.

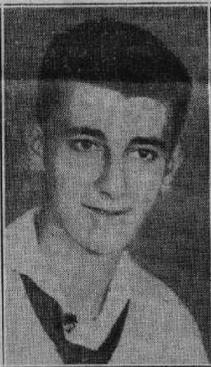
Three minutes until 8 o'clock Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, and sailors aboard the U. S. S. Raritan, anchored in Pearl Harbor, were scrambling into clean "whites" and knotting neckerchiefs for church call.

Then a deafening crash and the deep roar of a blast of high explosive. Those of the Raritan's crew below decks rushed topside to see hangars of the air station on shore burst into flames as 30 Jap planes, in waves of five, zoomed over the channel. They waited for no more. Even ahead of the old pipes and the barges, sailors were breaking down life lines and stanchions.

### First Ship in Action

"A-I-I h-a-n-d-s clear ship for action! Man yer battle stations!" Awnings were being ripped from their fastenings to clear the way for anti-aircraft fire and in seconds the crews started throwing a hail of lead into the sky. The Raritan's guns were the first to bark at the invaders.

Eight o'clock, and a torpedo blasted the forward engine room, killing 20 engineers and electricians. The ship jarred, then



MICHAEL DECICCO

Thursday morning. He is on furlough while his ship undergoes repairs in California.

"As soon as I saw the air station burning I ran to my gun station," Mike related. "But when I found out this was going to be an air battle I went to help feed anti-aircraft ammunition. Our gun got three Jap planes.

### Jap Pilot Cringing

"One of the planes swooped down close and a little yellow-belly leaned over the cockpit and grinned at us. As he made to go over a battle-wagon at anchor only a few hundred feet from our ship, I could see his torpedo shining under the plane.

"But the Jap flyer never let that torpedo go. Bursts from the Raritan's guns caught the plane and he crashed there in front of our eyes. Four other Jap planes, apparently with orders to sink the battleship, were forced to turn back before they got the same reception."

Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox later commended the Raritan's crew for saving a capital battleship.

"There were 12 Jap planes in all shot down by the boys on the Raritan," Mike said. "But we had to watch the Oglala, a mine-layer, sink right next to us. We saw the Oklahoma capsized and a destroyer blown up.

(Please turn to page eight)

(Continued from page one)

"We lost about 30 men on our ship, and about 100 were wounded. I saw one man blown to pieces by shrapnel from a bomb as he ran to his battle station.

### Fought Off Three Attacks

"The old spirit was tops with the gang at the gun I was on, but we didn't talk much during the three attacks. Each one lasted an hour. Between scraps we lined up our ammunition and waited and kept hoping they'd come back for another dose.

"There was plenty of cussin' while we stood and waited," Mike confessed with a grin. "If we'd only had a couple of minutes' notice we could have done a lot better. They caught us with our pants down. They weren't very good shots. A lot of their bombs plunked in the water."

The battle was over at 1 p. m. All night long Pearl Harbor soldiers and sailors stayed on watch, but the Japs never returned.

One false alarm sounded. Three days after the attack the captain called the Raritan's crew together and made a speech citing his men. Mike has a mimeographed copy. This is what the Raritan's skipper had to say:

"I want to take advantage of a little lull after the treacherous attack of Sunday morning to express my gratitude to all my shipmates for the magnificent manner in which each of you, to

the last man, upheld the traditions of the Navy on that historical occasion.

### Enemy Couldn't Take It

"The Japanese, while hiding behind a peace mission in Washington, cowardly sneaked the first blow by striking us with bombs and torpedo before the battle was on. But this was their last blow at the Raritan. Our guns were in action so quickly and so furiously they didn't any longer have the guts to face the music.

"Every man did the right job at the right time. Every man stood unflinchingly by his station. Our engineers kept us in power for our guns; our damage control kept our ship machinery intact; our lookouts and bridge details kept the Japanese planes spotted, and our gunners stood by their guns as veterans. In spite of early serious material casualties and the loss of many shipmates, our fire was continuous and decisive.

"Instances of personal courage are too great to enumerate here. Let it suffice that the Raritan has definitely won her place in history as a fighting ship which can give it always, and take it too when this must be done. I am proud to be your captain and shipmate and we are all proud of the good old fighting Raritan. Let us look to the future with a grim determination that our shipmates who were lost shall not have died in vain."

The island was blacked out every night after December 7. Leaves were granted for only a few hours at a time until the Raritan pulled out of Pearl Harbor January 5 for a West Coast base.

"On the way back we thought we spotted a Jap sub and dropped depth charges," Mike said. "But we never heard anything from it."

### Four East on Leave

As soon as the Raritan reached port members of the crew were given a 14-day furlough while the ship was being repaired. Mike headed East with Chester Vagroski, a shipmate from Perth Amboy, who had left his car in a California garage when the Raritan was sent to Hawaii a year ago. With them were two other sailors, Anthony Szeg, also of Perth Amboy, and Frank Dombkowski of Three Rivers, Mass. Teaming up again at an arranged meeting point, the four sailors start back to California today by train.

Mike attended Somerville High School and later drove a truck for the Redfern Lace Works here. Two years ago he enlisted in the Navy. He has two sisters, Mildred, 18, and Phyllis, 10, and two brothers, James Jr., 11, and Anthony, 8.

Mike confessed last night that he was "kinda anxious" to get back aboard the Raritan. "She's a real fightin' ship," he said.



Even before the U.S. entered the war, many Raritan guys were in the military. This picture was taken in Honolulu, Hawaii in April of 1941. The five Raritan guys are: L to R, Jimmie Tozzi, B. Paliani, Michael DeCicco, William Hratko, & Joe DiMaggio.

The day after the attack at Pearl Harbor, December 8<sup>th</sup>, a Monday afternoon, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) gave a brief speech before Congress asking for a “Declaration of War” against Japan. The majority of the U.S. population—a record 65 million people—listened intently to this broadcast which was carried by all the major radio networks. Even the children at school listened to his now famous speech. John Pacifico vividly recalls that on that next day at Somerville High School, at 12:30 PM, all the students were ushered into the auditorium for an important assembly. There over the school sound system they heard FDR’s speech.

His words, with his usual eloquent delivery, hit home with the American listener. The speech today is considered one of the finest of the 20th Century. The highlights of his seven-minute speech include:

*“Yesterday, December 7th, 1941—a date that will live in infamy -- the United States was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. ... No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory ... Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces -- with the unbounded determination of our people -- we will gain the inevitable triumph -- so help us God.”*

The next evening Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, FDR would give a more detailed talk to the American people about what had transpired and what now lay ahead.

With the shock of the attack at Pearl Harbor, Raritan families, like all families across America who had sons in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor, wondered if their sons were there that day. If so, did they survive the attack? While today the damages sustained by each ship can be viewed with a few clicks of a mouse, the details of what ships were damaged or destroyed were slow in being told to the public. The initial announcement simply said “extensive damage” was done to the fleet. Casualty numbers would slowly be mentioned with Roosevelt first using the word “thousands” a few days after.

The *Somerset Messenger Gazette*—which came out two days after the attack on Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>—made an attempt to list the Raritan guys that they thought were in Hawaii. It listed that at Pearl Harbor was Frank Del Rocco of 9 Doughty Street (aboard *The USS Astoria*) and Alfred Kachic of 8 Lincoln Street (aboard the *USS Pennsylvania*). William Hratko from 9 Nevius Street was listed as being with the Army Air Corp stationed at Hickman Field in Oahu, Hawaii, just outside Pearl Harbor. (Hickman Field was known to have been hit hard by the Japanese.) James Barbato of 11 Anderson Street and Frank Jacobs of 2 Railroad Avenue were also said to be in Hawaii. Joseph Balitski from 100 Thompson Street was said to be on *The USS Pecos* with the Pacific Fleet – and most of the Pacific Fleet was at Pearl Harbor. This news no doubt put their families and the local Raritan residents in distress. Relief would come as telegrams slowly arrived from the GIs to let their loved ones know that they survived the attack. After a couple weeks all the boys in Raritan would be accounted for. The small community would lose no men in this battle. That would not hold true for future battles.

In the next few days, weeks, and months towns throughout the country mobilized for war. It was reasoned that if the enemy could bomb Hawaii, they could also attack us stateside. To plan for such an event, each town designed air-raid wardens to help plan and organize in the case of an enemy attack by air. The new local airport at Solberg in Readington and the flying fields (as they were called) at South Somerville and Basking Ridge were closed temporarily until all worries subsided.

## **Enlistments Surge**

As the U.S. was thrust into war, young men from all towns were eager to enlist to fight for their country. The local recruiting office was a desk at the Somerville Post Office, which was staffed on Tuesdays. That first Tuesday morning after Pearl Harbor, 35 men came to see about enlisting, but

# Memorial Day 1942 at The Raritan Primary School

As the program below shows, the kids dressed as Soldiers, Nurses, Sailors, Marines, and Aviators. Raritan's Joyce Valeri (Walker) was in the 1st grade at The Raritan Primary School. The school was located where the Municipal Building is today.



PROGRAM

These are the forces that will win the war and make our world the world of Freedom, Happiness and Peace.

First Aid - Nurses and Doctors...Kindergar  
Mrs. Barnes  
Miss Seidonglanz

Drum Corps.....1st Grade  
Miss Mittoli

Soldiers.....1st Grade  
Miss Snyder

Aviators.....1st Grade  
Miss Terriberry

Sailors.....2nd Grade  
Miss Duryea

Parachute Troops.....2nd Grade  
Miss Ross

Fire Wardens.....3rd Grade  
Miss Drinkwater

War Stamps and Bonds.....3rd Grade  
Miss Morgan

Victory Garden.....3rd Grade  
Mrs. Pierson  
Mrs. Timpert

Marines.....4th Grade  
Mrs. Geraghty

Finale  
All Classes

Mrs. Glovinski who made a flag for our President, has made a flag for our school. To show our appreciation we are presenting her to you.

Songs

We're All Americans  
Remember Pearl Harbor  
God Bless America  
Star Spangled Banner

The audience is invited to sing our National Anthem with the children. The words are printed on the back.

\*\*\*

Joyce recalls that each kid made a patriotic program cover from construction paper for their parents in attendance. Nearly all of the parents attended this special event.

She remembers that the war touched all aspects of their lives. The men were overseas, including her father, there were constant news reports on the radio, and at school they always talked about the war.



Joyce Valeri (Walker) gives a salute in front of her house to her dad as this picture was sent overseas to him. Note the "Service Star" on the door in the background.

the military officer was not there. The post office employees referred these eager boys to the main recruiting office in New Brunswick, as all military staff needed to concentrate at one location to handle the large volume of volunteers. The eager young men boarded buses and headed to the New Brunswick office.

Some high school seniors at Somerville High School soon quit school to join the military. Principal Frank Lewis said that those who left mid-year in their senior year to join the service would still receive their high school diplomas. To aid in the manpower needed in the local war production plants, the local Board of Education voted to dismiss high school two weeks early so that the graduates could get to work at the industrial war plants.

The graduation at the end of June from Somerville High School took on special meaning. This graduating class had 234 students — including five who were absent — already in the service. Principal Frank Lewis spoke to the students and told the boys not to hold off from enlisting in the military. Telling them that any college plans should wait. He cited his own experience in World War I when he enlisted in the Navy and went to college afterward. “Many men, ex-officers, a lot of them, went back to school after the war and attacked their studies with more vigor than if they had gone straight to college.”

At the graduation ceremony, Clark Miller was given a medal as the best all-around athlete—he was chosen by the coaches. Raritan’s Catherine Mastice, who sang at the graduation ceremony, was named the student most likely to put Somerville on the map. She was popular locally, as she had sung at many events and on the radio.

Not only would “students” from Somerville High School leave to serve their country, so would the Principal, Frank Lewis, who had been at that post since 1929. During World War I Frank Lewis had been a first-class petty officer in the U.S. Navy. Part of his service had been aboard the *USS Arkansas*, a battleship that had just been hit by the Japs at Pearl Harbor. After the school dismissed in June of 1942 Captain Lewis had his orders to report to the Army Air Corp in Florida. Other teachers and nurses would leave the school for the greater cause. So too would the Somerville High School Football Coach, Ray Costello, leave the school to serve in the Coast Guard. At the Funderne School (located where *The People Care Center* is today) another Principal, Steve Poliacik, left to serve in the Navy early in 1942. His replacement, Aubrey Kemper, served just a few months before he was called into the Army.

### **All Together**

The entire country, one small town at a time, was quickly united — doing what they could do for the war effort. This can be seen in an editorial from *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* from December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

*Most of us have taken our country for granted during the past 20 years or so. Many millions of us have gotten around to a point where we wonder what our country is going to do for us next, rather than what we are going to do for our country ... Now most of us are on the giving end ... Our recruiting stations have been swamped since Pearl Harbor. Thousands are giving time to spot airplanes, air wardens are being organized, auxiliary nursing services are being formed ... America is swinging into action. There are not many good sides to war, but this is one of them. The spirit of sacrifice during times like these is what makes a great nation.*

\* The underlined words sound very similar to John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech January 20th, 1961 where he said “*And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*”

### **The initial suspicions of local Japanese, Germans, and even Italians**

As the country went to war much was happening very quickly. Many new processes were being enacted and organizations were forming. It would take time for the U.S. to get it all right. And some wrongs would be done in the initial panic of being thrust into war. Soon after the U.S. “Declaration of War” on Japan, Germany declared war on the U.S. and the U.S. responded with declaring war back on both Germany and it’s lesser partner-in-crime Italy. After that the government authorities felt that “enemy aliens” - those living in the U.S. who were not U.S. citizens — from Japan, Germany, and even Italy -- were suspect. The New Jersey State Police, following orders from President Roosevelt, issued an

# Somerville High School

It was the area's only High School—it served Somerville, Raritan, Bridgewater, Branchburg, & Hillsborough



The High School was in the building that today is used as The Somerville Middle School

## - Newspaper Headlines from 1942 -

**Schools Will Close Early to Release Students for Work**  
Factories Waiting for Boys

**Air Corps Gives Somerville High School Principal Lewis Post as Captain**  
Ordered to Florida. Head of H.S. served in Navy in First World War

**Somerville High School will Lose Two More Teachers And School Nurse to Armed Forces**



Honoring Frank H. Lewis, Teachers, and Members of Somerville High School Who Are Serving in the United States Armed Forces

The above photo and caption are from the 1943 Somerville High School Yearbook. It honors their Principal Frank Lewis who left to join the military.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette

Editorial - June 1942

### War Class

Graduation at the high school came so quickly this year that we were hardly ready for the event. We usually work ourselves up to an editorial about the responsibilities facing the young men and women in our graduating class about mid-June. We are doing that now, and commencement has passed.

These responsibilities this year are so evident that it is scarcely necessary to list them. We are at war, and in war the young carry a tremendous burden. Some of this year's graduates are already fighting age. Many others will be in a year or two. Mere children are already in the war on the Russian front.

Perhaps it might be more helpful if we pointed out that those recent graduates have an obligation to themselves and their families as well as the nation. The war may be over in a couple of years. Perhaps sooner. Then it will be up to all of us to settle back into civilian life again. That's what wars are fought for ... for the peace that follows.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette

Editorial—June 1942

### Captain Lewis

We are sure we represent the community when we wish Captain Frank H. Lewis well in his new work, and hope that he will return to Somerville when the war is over. A school executive is in a unique position to influence the character of a great part of the men and women of his community. The boys and girls who attend school under his administration are bound to be influenced by his thought and action. They carry away with them a part of such a man, as a part of their own character. Somerville has been fortunate to have a man like Mr. Lewis in this important position. He is the kind of man a community is lucky to share, and we hope that he will again live and work among us before long.

order that non-citizens of German, Italian or Japanese descent immediately surrender their cameras, short-wave radios, and firearms. These items would be returned by the government “when possible”. The necessity of all this was questionable, especially in instances where some old ladies showed up at local police headquarters to turn in their cameras. After one month, the local authorities would be relieved of this questionable duty as the FBI took it over. The FBI then reduced their scope of the distrust. Rather than do an inclusive search of all enemy aliens, they would act more on individual tips concerning suspected aliens.

The large scale suspicion of anyone from Italy would fade. Raritan was a perfect example of why this was so. The mostly Italian town twenty years earlier in World War I had an excellent record of duty to its country. True, there were some Italians in Raritan who just arrived in this country and were not “official” U.S. citizens, but most of these were relatives of other Raritan residents. So after the initial panic resulting from the surprise attack, it did not matter (for the most part) if you were Italian in America during World War II. Italy was known to have been a reluctant ally to Germany as Italian Dictator Mussolini had forced his people into war.

While the Italians were no longer suspect, the distrust of any Japanese living in this country would continue throughout the war. In May of 1942, FBI agents came through Somerset County and, in cooperation with local police units, completed a search of 45 Japanese homes. A few rifles, some ammunition, short-wave radio receivers, and photographic equipment were found and confiscated. While the distrust from the government and much of the population was tough on these Japanese on the East Coast, they would fare better than the Japanese on the West Coast who were removed from their homes and forced to live in camps for most of the war.

Raritan and Somerville had no Japanese residents. However, one Japanese man, Toichi Hauada, commuted to work each day from New York City to work as a cook at *The Hotel Somerset* in Somerville. Days before Pearl Harbor, he was just a relatively unknown 60-year-old chef who was usually out of sight in the kitchen. However, two weeks after Pearl Harbor, there was much concern of his presence – and an article on the front page of the SMG about him. The local writer seemed to have a more balanced view than some of the panicked government officials (and residents) as the writer made it clear that the Japanese man had been living in this country 41 years. The article quoted the chef saying that he was very disappointed in his home land and that he feels more like an American than Japanese. He went on to say “I have almost forgotten Japan, for I’ve adopted all American customs.”

### **Last Civil War Vet Died**

Ironically, the area’s last surviving veteran of the Civil War, William Collins of Vanderveer Avenue in Somerville, passed away at age 93 — just a few months into the war. Having being the last surviving veteran from the greatest war in our history, he had received a lot of attention from the local community. He rode in some parades and was sometimes quoted in the paper. His niece whom he lived with told the paper that he denounced the bombing at Pearl Harbor as the “lowest, dirtiest trick possible.” And that one of his quotes in his last days was “I guess we’ll just have to get those Japs.” Just two years before when events abroad started to heat up, William Collins predicted that we would be at war with Japan – and he was quoted in that 1939 article as saying to defend my country “I will shoulder a gun myself.” He further added “Guns will roar and men will march to die again because a few nations are trying to rule the world and put religion, freedom, and liberty out of business.”

# The Annual Celebration of St. Rocco

Somerset Messenger  
Gazette

Editorial Aug 19th, 1941  
*Estimate 20,000 Watch  
St. Rocco Fireworks*

One of the largest crowds in the history of the 41-year-old St. Rocco celebration witnessed the elaborate fireworks display starting at midnight Saturday and lasting for an hour.

More than 20,000 persons jammed the grounds on Old York Road and gathered at vantage points in the vicinity. For miles along Route 29 cars were parked by persons who viewed the display of set pieces, aerial bombs and skyrockets.



It is the tradition of Italian Churches such as St. Ann in Raritan to pay special tribute and honor to saints who are well-known by Italians. Raritan's celebration of St. Rocco began as a simple procession and a parish picnic in the early years of St. Ann's Church. By the 1940s it had evolved into a weeklong celebration with parades, bands, concerts, street lights, vendors and fireworks. It was held during the week of August 16<sup>th</sup>. (Today it is held at the end of June to coincide with the St. Ann's Fiesta.) The fiesta is a special tribute to St. Rocco. A statue is carried through the street – the same statue has been used for over 100 years.

St. Rocco is one of the favorite sons of the Italian people because of his work among the poor and the sick. During the time of the plague, he brought about many miraculous cures through his prayers and touching of hands.

He was born in France about 1295. He was the son of a governor and lived a wealthy life as a young man. When he was orphaned at the age of 20, he gave all his property to the poor and set out on a pilgrimage to Rome. He went from town to town helping victims of the plague - miraculously curing many of them. Later he himself became infected and he developed a sore on his thigh. Believing the infection was contagious he wandered into the forest to die alone. While he was there, a dog visited him and became his friend. The dog would run out every day and return to him bread and other types of food.

St. Rocco eventually recovered from his illness and made his way back to France. However, due to his unhealthy appearance and poor physical condition, he was not recognized and was imprisoned as a spy.

He died in prison in 1327. After his death he was recognized by a cross-shaped birthmark on his chest. He was then mourned by his relatives. He went on to be remembered in Europe as a Saint who had the gift of healing – a particularly useful and beneficial gift at a time when medicine was still powerless in the face of epidemics.

The letters VSR — Viva Santo Rocco — were once inscribed over many of the doorways of Europe as a method of protection against pestilence and plague and infectious diseases.

The statue of St. Rocco is considered unique among theologians because of his pose. It is most unusual because it depicts him with his left hand pointing to an open sore on his left leg. Few images of saints expose any afflictions or handicaps.



## Airplane Observation Posts

To keep watch for any enemy planes, nine airplane observation posts were set up throughout Somerset County. These posts were little shacks equipped with a phone that had an accessible rooftop. There were relatively few planes in the sky in 1942. The altitude that these planes flew allowed an observer with good eyesight to be able to identify them. To aid in airplane identification each post had pictures and diagrams of all kinds of planes on its walls. One wall had the planes of our enemies, the other wall had our planes.

The observers would sit outside on the roof of the shack. When a plane was sighted, they would climb down off the roof and telephone into the army tracking center to report the type of plane and the direction that it was heading. All planes were reported so that a clear picture could be kept of the overall situation in the sky. These observation posts were initially staffed 24 hours per day 7 days per week. The observers were volunteers – who worked in pairs. Each shift was just two hours long to insure the person's attention would not lapse. Another reason for the short shift was that this could be a long time spent out in the freezing cold, especially at night with the wind blowing.

The nearest lookout post to Raritan was listed in the newspaper as “Just west of Raritan on Route 29” (Route 202 today.) (No one could be found that remembers the exact location.) Another post was just south of Somerville at Hamilton Farm on River Road in Hillsborough. Other posts were on the mountains at Warrenville and in the hills of Bernards Township. For the first part of the war these posts were taken very seriously, but as the war went on and our enemies were obviously reduced to being on the defensive rather than on the offensive, these posts were abandoned. But in the initial anxious first year of the war, they gave reassurance to a nervous public.

## Blackout / Air Raid Drills

With the real possibility of enemy planes dropping bombs on the U.S., it was necessary to prepare by doing blackout drills. The standard defense when being bombed from above is that all lights should be turned off to hide the location of the densely-populated areas. This way a city would look no different than the countryside – thus making accurate bomb dropping difficult. To prepare for this, it would be necessary hold blackout drills (also called air raid drills). Each town would designate several air-raid wardens. Raritan divided parts of town into different zones with an air-raid warden in charge of each. The air-raid warden would pass along instructions to the local people as what to do for a blackout.

Each blackout (drill or real) would be signaled by a power whistle. The signal would be 6 short bursts followed by 4 short bursts. Residents were to turn off all lights in the home except for one room provided that room had dark curtains so that the light would not be visible outside. Any cars on the road were to get off the road within 5 minutes.

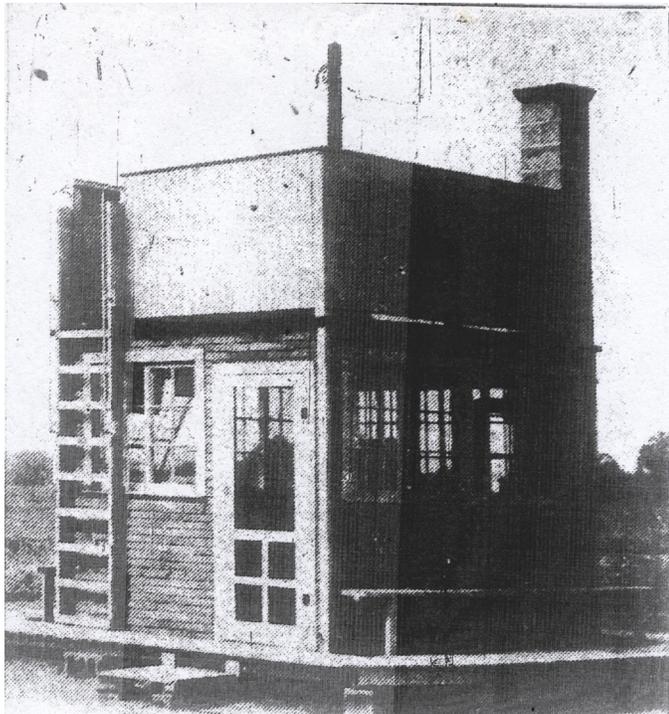
The first air-raid drill in Raritan was at the end of April 1942. Most of Somerset County had the drill at the same time. It was a well-publicized drill. Most went pretty well, but there were a few problems. The whistle used to signal the air-raid in Raritan was the work whistle at the Raritan Woolen Mills. This whistle could barely be heard in the outer parts of town. To fix this for future air-raids drills, the more powerful whistle at the Raritan Firehouse would be used. The whistle at the Raritan Woolen Mills had initially been chosen because that location was staffed 24 hours a day. So now the fire station would have to have someone ready at all times to signal in the event of an air raid. However, as with all the new wartime duties volunteers in Raritan were plentiful. Another problem during the first test blackout was that one family had gone out during the day (not to return until after the blackout drill) and had not realized that they had left their lights on. The air-raid wardens would tell people to be careful in the future about leaving lights on when heading out for the evening.

Another problem with the first air-raid drill was that “PSEG” had trouble coordinating their phone calls to have the street lights shut off, thus the streets did not darken until 8 minutes into the air raid drill. This problem was fixed for next time.

Even though the blackout test was just 15 minutes, it was decided that the war production plants of Calco and Johns Manville would not participate in the drill, as authorities thought it was more important for them to keep on working — churning out much needed supplies for the war.

Future air-raids drills would add more complexity — such as the movement of various emergency vehicles and personnel to needed areas. The air-raid drills would continue several times per year throughout the war. Initially in 1942, the first year of the war, there was great concern of a possible enemy attack. So these drills were taken very seriously. As the war progressed, it was realized that the probability of airplanes bombing the U.S. homefront was very remote.

# Preparing For the Possible Air Attack



Several Airplane Observation Posts, like the one above that was in Hillsborough, were setup throughout Somerset County

## Somerset Messenger Gazette

Editorial—Nov 1942

### *Airplane Observation Posts*

Dedication of the Army's airplane observation post for the Somerville area, which will take place Sunday, directs attention to this task which has been carried on by Somerville residents continuously during the 11 months since Pearl Harbor. There has not been an hour during the time we have been at war when this post has not been manned.

There is nothing unusual about this, of course. Hundreds of similar posts on the Eastern seaboard, including others in our county, have the same praiseworthy record. Yet the fidelity with which many observers have served their country in this way belies the criticism that "America does not know there is a war going on." Such critics haven't been getting up in the middle of the night for a two-hour watch, and working at their regular tasks the next day.

All visible and audible flights are reported by our amateur listening posts. An enemy plane which was forced to the ground during or after a raid would be reported at once.

Certainly this is important work, work which is carried on continually despite appreciable demands on the time and endurance of thousands of patriots.

**The first Air Raid (Blackout) Drill was held in Raritan in April of 1942.  
The drills would continue throughout the war.**

## DURING A BLACKOUT

Don't sit in the dark if it can be avoided. Experience has proven this to be a poor psychological move. Arrange to have one room properly blacked out, so the lights can be left on. If you can't do this before next Wednesday, do it as soon as possible.

**DON'T GET EXCITED  
DON'T GO OUTSIDE  
DON'T GO NEAR THE WINDOWS  
DON'T USE THE TELEPHONE  
DON'T LISTEN TO RUMORS**

**ABOVE ALL—USE YOUR HEAD  
AND KEEP COOL**

## Somerset Messenger Gazette

Editorial May 1942

### *Blackout Success*

It is hard to see how the blackout staged last week by New Jersey defense authorities could be called anything but a success. When it is considered that almost 4 million people were brought into the participation of a practice mobilization against the possibility of danger from the sky, it can be appreciated that a gigantic task was undertaken and skillfully discharged.

It is always a tough job to marshal this many individuals into any one event. The great civilian organization which has been set up to guide our people in time of danger performed its task without a hitch.

## Accidental Deaths Around Town

Many of the safety standards and rules of common sense that are prevalent today had not yet been established in the 1940s. As a result, accidental deaths were all too common.

The Raritan River was the site of one such tragedy. The 1940s were an era where home air conditioning was unknown, so the river was a crowded place on a hot summer day. The popular location to swim was near what was known as the “second dam”, which was just over the Raritan border in the Bradley Gardens section of Bridgewater. You were not “supposed” to swim in the river. Many parents forbid their kids from swimming there, while other parents understood that it was what boys did. Yet the river had its dangers. The depth of the water varied considerably around the dam. It was 4 feet deep in most areas, but where the water ran off the end of the dam, the depth quickly dropped to 10 feet. The boys who swam in the river knew the river’s landscape and avoided trouble. In fact, the boys made the dip in the river look quite carefree – a safe place to cool off.

Tragically, on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, a woman who had rented a bungalow by the river, saw the boys swimming and judged that it would be safe for her and her four-year-old son to also take a dip. Initially they seemed to be enjoying their swim at the edge of the water. The 40 or so boys who were swimming close by had seen the woman and her child in the water, but no one paid them much attention. That was until one of the youngest boys saw a hand clutching out of the deep section of the water. He went to an older group of teenagers and told them what he had seen. It was then that they all noticed that the woman and her 4-year-old son were gone. Some of the boys started diving and another ran to get help. After 25 minutes, three of the brave youths from Bradley Gardens — Arthur Underhill, Stanley Olson, and Harry Harvey, (ages 15-17), recovered the bodies and brought them out of the water. The Raritan-Somerville Rescue Squad was, by then, on the scene and tried to revive them, but to no avail. The bodies were then taken to The Bourke Funeral Home in Raritan.

The Raritan Rail Yard was another danger spot in town. It encompassed a much larger area than today, as it included a circular track that allowed a train to turn around. This “Round-house” was on the land at the corner of First Avenue and Johnson Drive where *Lab Corp* is today. Raritan was then the last stop on the residential line. The train tracks did extend westward to Pennsylvania, but only for freight service. In one three-day period in September of 1943, two men were killed in separate accidents in the rail yard.

The first death occurred to an employee of the railroad. In the rail yard, some tracks were side-by-side with just enough space between them to allow two railcars to avoid hitting each other. There was not even enough space for a body to fit. A man from North Plainfield was exiting from a coal car when another train was maneuvering through the rail yard. The railroader did not look for the additional train, which was moving past his train, and he was pinned between the cars and crushed to death.

Another fatal accident happened just three days later. This time it took the life of Raritan resident Steven Rusko of 45 Quick Avenue. He was running a quick errand and took a shortcut over the tracks by the rail yard. At the time, several trains were idling in the yard. The noise from the idling trains drowned out the noise of the approaching train and Steve Rusko was hit by the train as it left the station. A yard worker had called out to him to watch out, but the noise prevented Steve from hearing the warning and he was killed instantly.

While the lack of modern safety procedures led to several deaths, sometimes tragedy was averted with a little luck and divine intervention. One evening in November of 1945, John Pacifico had an exciting evening planned. It was his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and his Uncle Louis lent him his car so John could go on a date with a Raritan girl named Doris Granskie. He hoped that it would be a fun night — one to never forget. After picking her up, they traveled north up First Avenue. In those days, First Avenue did not go under the train tracks, but intersected with it. This was the era of “driver beware”, as automatic train gates were two decades away. As they approached the train intersection John slowed down to look. That night was dark and foggy, but all seemed clear. However, as they traveled over the tracks a train heading east (that had just started out of the rail yard) hit their car squarely and began to drag the car. The weight and force of the train kept it moving, but fortunately the train had been traveling slowly as it had just started. The car was dragged for several blocks – it did not stop until Thompson Street. An accident like this could have had a tragic result, but they were amazingly not injured. It seemed like a miracle — as if God had intervened — saving the driver for future work. Indeed, John Pacifico would later become a deacon. Serving 35 years at the church that was just a couple blocks from where the train came to a stop. That night, John Pacifico gave thanks to the Lord that he and his date walked away. Then he called his Uncle Louie who loaned him the car.

# The Center of Social Life was Raritan's Taverns

## All were owned by Raritan Families



Minetti's Bar was where *Mangia Buono Caterers* is today.  
(The building has been revamped.)



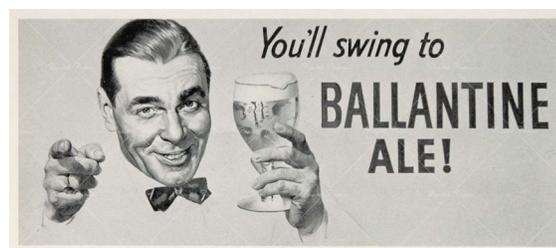
Rocky Miele's Bar *The Park Grill*  
was where the Raritan Laundromat is today.  
(Same building)



DeCicco's Tavern, then known as the Anderson Tavern, was  
located where it is today at 10 Anderson Street.



The Centennial Tavern, which most everyone called  
Orlando's Tavern, was at 10 Wall Street.  
The building is gone—it burned down in the  
1980s and has been replaced by a home.



## Somerville – Raritan Chapter of The Red Cross

In 1941, *The Red Cross* was the premiere charitable organization in the U.S., with many local chapters throughout the country. The local branch was the *Somerville-Raritan Chapter of the Red Cross*. Their headquarters was at 76 Main Street in Somerville. They would serve the towns of not just Somerville and Raritan, but most of Bridgewater and Hillsborough. The Raritan part of the chapter (at the start of the war) was headed by Angelo Soriano.

When the U.S. entered the war in 1942, the local chapter set a goal of raising \$12,000. This was part of a larger goal for the U.S. to raise millions. Over a hundred local volunteers would go door-to-door throughout the local towns to ask for donations.

*The Red Cross* goals were set by Father Robert Graham, Rector of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Somerville. At the first meeting after Pearl Harbor, he addressed the workers. His comments would be printed on the front page of *The Messenger Gazette*. He said “*Every American has the opportunity to plumb the depth of patriotism. Dig down deeply. Give of your heart and of your purse. Give and give until it hurts. That is what we can all do.*” He then handed a check for \$100 from his church to the chairman of the *Red Cross*. Father Graham would remain active on the homefront making many contributions to the war effort.

During World War II, the *American Red Cross*'s outreach touched nearly all. Nearly every family contained a member who had either served as a Red Cross volunteer, made contributions of money, gave blood, or was a recipient of Red Cross services. During the war there were over 7 million Red Cross volunteers in the U.S. — with a paid staff of 39,000. Their services were vast and made a tremendous difference in the war. Just to name a few — the American Red Cross would begin a blood donor program, provide volunteers to serve in hospitals to alleviate the shortage of medical personnel who had been released to the military, and they provided food and medical packages to American Prisoners held in German POW camps.

At the outbreak of the war, The Somerville-Raritan chapter occupied one office and a storeroom, but as the war progressed the Red Cross expanded to 19 rooms. After Pearl Harbor, the chapter set out on a large fundraising drive. Nationally, the American Red Cross would set its goal at raising \$50 million. Most of the workers in the local Red Cross were volunteers —only the full-time nurses were paid. Raritan organized into districts to collect the money. The head of each district were people who were involved in other aspects of the community. They included Reverend Rowland Koskamp of *The Third Reformed Church*, police chief Lorenzo Rossi, and tavern owner (and future mayor) Rocky Miele. With the start of the war energizing the Raritan and Somerville population, the fundraisers made their goal and then some — bringing in \$18,000.

Another task of the local Red Cross was to organize blood drives. In 1942, the local chapter organized three blood drives. They were all held at Somerville High School. The Red Cross had a mobile unit that was stationed in New York City that brought in the cots, equipment, and part of the staff necessary to collect blood. The remainder of the staff was drawn from the local population. Each drive collected blood from approximately 125 volunteers. This blood collected was later used overseas on injured U.S. soldiers. The first major island invasion at Tarawa used “thousands” of units of blood collected by the Red Cross to save the lives of the brave that had been injured taking the island from the Japanese.

Another benefit they provided was to give packages to soldiers as they were heading overseas. In this era, all products, even the small comforts that we take for granted today, were valued. And the Red Cross ran a drive where for a \$1 donation a citizen could supply a package to a soldier. They called it the “Kit Bag Fund”. The package would include soap, a package of cigarettes, playing cards, shoe polishing cloth, a pencil, and writing materials. Every soldier would greatly appreciate these items.

The Red Cross organized the knitting of much-needed sweaters. Dozens of local women spent many hours in the home or at the Red Cross Center knitting clothes that would keep the soldiers and civilians in the war zones warm.

# The Somerville—Raritan Chapter of *The American Red Cross*

*This chapter covered Somerville, Raritan, Hillsborough, Branchburg, and most of Bridgewater.*

The Red Cross was the premiere charitable organization in the U.S., with many local chapters. They provided many services throughout the war. They sponsored blood drives, staffed volunteers at hospitals, and provided much-needed food and medical supplies to American prisoners of war.



Registrations for the next blood bank are now being taken.

Camp Kilmer boys were the recipients of 50 sweaters, 10 pairs of socks, and 5 helmets.

A new class in home nursing will start soon. Register by calling the Red Cross office.

One dollar provides all the articles necessary to fill a Red Cross Kit bag for a soldier. These kits serve as a reminder to each soldier that the good wishes of the people at home go with him overseas.

Typewriters in good condition are desperately needed in the office. Please lend them to us for the duration.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette Editorial - Nov 1941 *The Red Cross*

It should scarcely be necessary to point out the need to support the Red Cross this year. The Red Cross is our No. 1 philanthropic organization in the United States. All other charities are judged against its standard. Its name is familiar in every American household. The first thing anyone thinks about when there is a catastrophe is "Where is the Red Cross?" As most of us know, the Red Cross is always there as soon as it is possible.

## \$12,000 War Goal Set by Red Cross

The Somerville-Raritan Chapter, American Red Cross, has been asked to raise \$12,000 as its quota in this area towards the \$50,000,000 drive launched by the national organization.

Plans for the campaign will be outlined soon by Chairman Nelson V. N. Dungan.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette Editorial - Dec 23rd 1941 *Red Cross Drive*

The Red Cross Drive which started this week is a "must" now and not a "may". In time of national disaster we always turn to this organization to relieve suffering. We have had, compared to European countries, very little suffering. Yet we have no way of knowing what is in store for us and it is important that the Red Cross be in financial condition to accept almost any kind of responsibility. The Red Cross cannot produce miracles of performance in times of emergency unless we perform miracles of giving now. It's going to hurt. But that's the way with war.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette Editorial - Oct 1942 *Blood Donors*

Blood donors are needed for the bank which will be sponsored by the Somerville—Raritan Red Cross Chapter Saturday November 7th. Potential donors need only know that the plasma which was available for use at Pearl Harbor last December saved the lives of many men. Medical science has found that this substance alleviates the effect of shock and rapid loss of blood when men are gravely wounded in battle. The Red Cross needs to make certain that there is an adequate blood bank to draw upon when the inevitable conflict takes place which will result in high American casualties.

## Scrap Metal Drives

To gear up for mass production on a scale never seen before, the U.S. government put out a request for citizens to turn in their scrap metal. Each town established a collection location where residents could drop off old junk metal. This metal would then be shipped to factories that would melt it down to make weapons. In Raritan metal could be dropped off in front of the Raritan Woolen Mills.

In Somerville, a fenced-in enclosure was set up in front of the courthouse. These piles of “junk” were hard to describe. They consisted of almost anything made of metal. Old typewriters, stoves, tools, carriages, toys, and iron beds just to name a few. Some items were written on before they were put on the pile. Inscriptions such as “A Kiss For Adolph” or one old saw said “Use on a Jap.” Even one old broken-down car was pushed next to the pile and left for Uncle Sam.

Both Raritan and Somerville’s VFW had an old canon that was previously a roadside showpiece, but this was no era for fancy showpieces, so these canons were added to the scrap collection.

In addition to that old canon, there was an old 6-ton tank that was on display in a park at West End and Frelinghuysen Ave. in Raritan. It was a souvenir from World War I. Now it would be scrapped. Metal from a previous war would be re-molded into a weapon for the next war.

Another trophy from World War I, a large mortar gun, that was on display at what was then known as the VFW triangle at Somerset and Canal Street in Raritan (where the Basilone Statue is today) was deemed more useful as scrap metal than a roadside attraction. But since this old gun had been a proud town landmark, the dismantling and discarding of it was done in a ceremony. At this unique ceremony, a speech was said, a wreath laid, and the National Anthem sung. A priest from a nearby town, Chaplain Bainton, who headed part of the scrap metal drive, said a prayer. Then as soon as the ceremonies concluded, the same Chaplain who led the prayer got out an acetylene torch and went to work dismantling the large gun so that the pieces could be easily moved to the factories.

On a few weekends, scrap metal drives were held in Bridgewater / Raritan. Residents with scrap to donate were to leave out the items at their curb and trucks would come along and collect it. Much like bulk pick-up is today. Residents were told “*All* scrap metal will be *rushed* to war plants to be converted into bombers, tanks, and shells.” In reality, a lot of scrap metal that had been collected sat for a while and not all the metal was deemed usable for war production purposes. However, the scrap metal drive was still useful in war production. If nothing else, it certainly helped build morale on the homefront.

The need for scrap metal forced some overdue demolition projects to get done. The old trolley tracks in Raritan, which were out of service since 1929, were finally removed and added to the scrap pile. In Somerville, the abandoned Regent Movie Theatre, which had been closed for several years, at last had its seats, railings, and radiators removed and sent to the scrap metal heap. The theatre had been in operation from the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s.

Some creative ways were found to help collect scrap metal. One Saturday, October 24, 1942, both local theatres *The Raritan Playhouse* and *The Cort Theatre* in Somerville held morning matinees where admission was free if you donated at least 10 pounds of scrap metal.

All the local papers helped promote the scrap metal drives. *The Somerville Messenger Gazette* ran a full page ad saying “It is your patriotic duty to salvage the things you don’t need.” The paper told people to “search your attic, search your cellar, and search your barn. Those old useless things can be converted into much needed weapons of war.” The ad did acknowledge that some factories were offering to buy scrap metal. Therefore, it was alright if you made money from the scrap provided, of course, that you purchased war bonds with that money.

# Scrap Metal Drives

Metal was needed to make war supplies. The whole country pitched in.

## Somerset Messenger Gazette

Editorial—Sep 1942

### Raritan to Launch Scrap Metal Rally

RARITAN—This town will “get in the scrap” beginning Saturday joining other New Jersey municipalities which are conducting “junk rallies”.

Mayor James J. Del Monte turned over the task of collecting scrap to the Raritan American Legion Post. On Saturday town trucks will make collections of scrap metal, which households are asked to leave on their curbsides.

A large bin will be erected in front of the Raritan Woolen Mills, with the public invited to take scrap metal and deposit it.

## 1942 Newspaper Headlines

Ten Pounds of Scrap For Movie Admission

Old Regent Movie Theatre Being Stripped of Scrap

Trench Mortar Gun at Raritan Goes into Scrap Heap

### SEARCH YOUR ATTIC



There are plenty of things in your attic that have outlived their usefulness as well as any sentimental value. And, there are plenty of people in town who will pay for these things many times over what the classified ad that sells them for you costs! For paying results, advertise in the classified section of the community's most-read newspaper.

### BUY DEFENSE STAMPS WITH THE CASH

Spend the money you earn by selling “scrap” on United States Defense Bonds and Stamps! It's just plain common sense to invest your dollars in support of Victory. Read the ads in the classified section of this newspaper and if the one you're looking for isn't there . . . insert your own!

PHONE 1000

Just a small ad in the classified section will bring you dollars and cents for things you no longer want or need. Place your ad today—delay may mean lost cash!

### SEARCH YOUR CELLAR



You may be walking on a “gold mine” of junk that can pay off in good money! Old papers and rags, useless things made of metal, all can be sold for salvage and be converted into much needed weapons of war. There may be an ad today in the classified section of this newspaper, looking for the scrap you have idle in your cellar! Read its columns now!

### SEARCH YOUR BARN



Those old metal farm implements that are waste, rusting in your barn can be welded into fighting weapons! Sell your scrap through the classified section of this newspaper. It costs so little and will bring you more money to invest in United States Defense Bonds and stamps.

# The Yankees, Raritan, & Baseball During WWII

No discussion of life in Raritan during the 1940s (wartime or not) would be complete without talking about the Yankees. Baseball was then a big part of America. It was much more popular than any other sport. It was truly the National Pastime. The players played for the love of the game — not their paychecks. An avid baseball fan for life, John Pacifico sums it up:

*“Baseball back then was the epitome of integrity. Players played hard and for the love of the game. They usually stayed with one team for most of their career. Thus, they were dedicated to the fans and the cities they played in.”*

In the forties, one's identity was defined by which baseball team they rooted for. There were three New York teams that one could choose for their favorite. There were *The Brooklyn Dodgers* who played at Ebbets Field, *The New York Giants* who played at the Polo Grounds, and *The New York Yankees* who played at (the original) Yankee Stadium. Raritan's team was, without a doubt, the Yankees. This was because the Yankees had a few Italian ballplayers that the Italian-American community of Raritan could root for. The Yankees 1st Italian player had been Tony Lazzeri whose Yankee career spanned 1926—1937. Shortstop Frank Crosetti joined the team in 1932. In 1936, the great Joe DiMaggio made his debut with the Yankees. In 1941, Phil Rizzuto, another Italian, took the starting shortstop job away from Frank Crosetti. About 85% of Raritan residents were Yankee fans. It was those who were not Italian that seemed to pick another team as their favorite. But this could be a painful choice, as when the season ended, it was usually the Yankees who finished on top.

There was no television to watch in the early 1940s. So to see the Yankees one had to go to the stadium. Watching these players at the game who were read about in the newspaper each day and who were talked about in the local taverns was thrilling in this age with few entertainment mediums. Attending a game at Yankee Stadium was always special for the fans. So much was new and novel. Even the voice heard over the PA system seemed magical.

A trip from Raritan to Yankee Stadium was simple and stress free. One took the train right from Raritan to Elizabeth. Then you took the ferry from there into Manhattan. It was a relaxing trip, as there was not much concern of crime.

The games were much shorter back then. They often were finished in two hours—an hour quicker than today. Seldom was the action stopped to warm up a relief pitcher. A starter was expected to finish the game. Also, with no timeouts for television, there was less time between innings. All the games played at Yankee Stadium during World War II were played during the day, as there were no lights at the stadium. (Lights would be installed after the war in 1946.) There was another unique routine which may seem very strange to today's fans. Back then the players left their gloves on the field when they came in to bat. Baseball gloves then were much flatter and softer so they had little chance of tripping up a fielder trying to catch a ball.

When the U.S. first entered World War II, there was debate as to whether baseball should continue or not. The baseball commissioner sent a letter to President Roosevelt asking what his thoughts were. The President quickly responded, giving baseball the green light, saying that we needed baseball as a distraction from the war. FDR felt it would keep up the morale of the war production workers on the homefront. While the President was for baseball continuing, he did state that the able players would still be subject to serving in the military. Hundreds of players would eventually serve in the military. This took a while to happen as in 1942 - the first year of the war - most players remained in major league baseball. However, after hard fought battles at Midway and Guadalcanal, the U.S. began to realize that the war would not be won quickly. Thus the public started to reason—shouldn't these players be serving their country? So after the 1942 season, a large percentage of players joined the military. One was Joe DiMaggio. When he joined the army, his salary went from \$37,500 for playing baseball to \$1500 for an army private. Would the players of today do the same?

In addition to DiMaggio, other Yankee players left major league baseball for military service after the 1942 season. They included outfielder Tommy Heinrich, pitcher Red Ruffing, and shortstop Phil Rizzuto. Others such as second baseman Joe Gordon, catcher Bill Dickey, outfielder Charlie Keller and pitcher Marius Russo would stay to play in the 1943 season, but would join the service after that. The Yankee teams of 1944 and 1945, like other teams, were almost completely different than the years before.

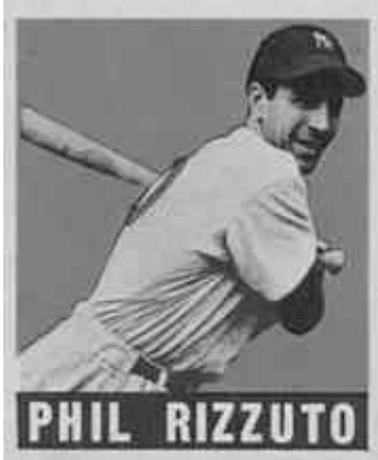
Upon joining the military, the players received their orders. Ironically most baseball players were ordered to play baseball for military teams. The games they played were often in front of GIs that were training stateside. These games were an excellent morale-booster. Several Raritan servicemen wrote about seeing these baseball games in the letters they sent home. At times the baseball players resented the special treatment that they were given. Joe DiMaggio even asked for another assignment, but he was ordered to continue playing baseball. The military baseball teams had so many star players that when they played exhibition games against major league teams they usually won.

Only two major league baseball players were killed in the war. Both players had played only a handful of games in the majors. Not being well-known, they did not get the safe assignment of playing baseball stateside. These players were Elmer Gedeon, an outfielder who had played 4 games with the Washington Senators, and Harry O'Neil, a catcher who played one inning with the Philadelphia Athletics.

Baseball supported the war effort in a variety of ways. War bond drives were held at the games. Patriotic

# Most Raritan Residents were avid Yankee Fans

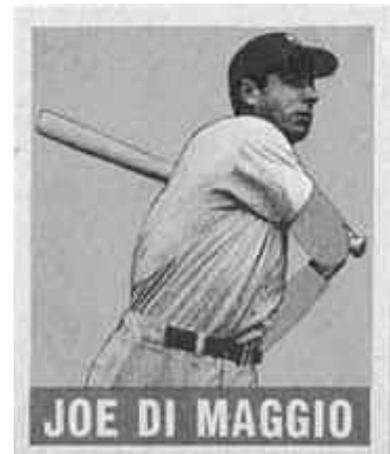
The Italian Players on the Yankees solidified Raritan's passion for the team



Phil Rizzuto started his playing career with the Yankees in 1941. He ended it in 1956. He would be a Yankee announcer from 1957 to 1996.



Frank Crosetti started his playing career with the Yankees in 1932 and ended it in 1946. He stayed on as a Yankee coach, 1946-1968.



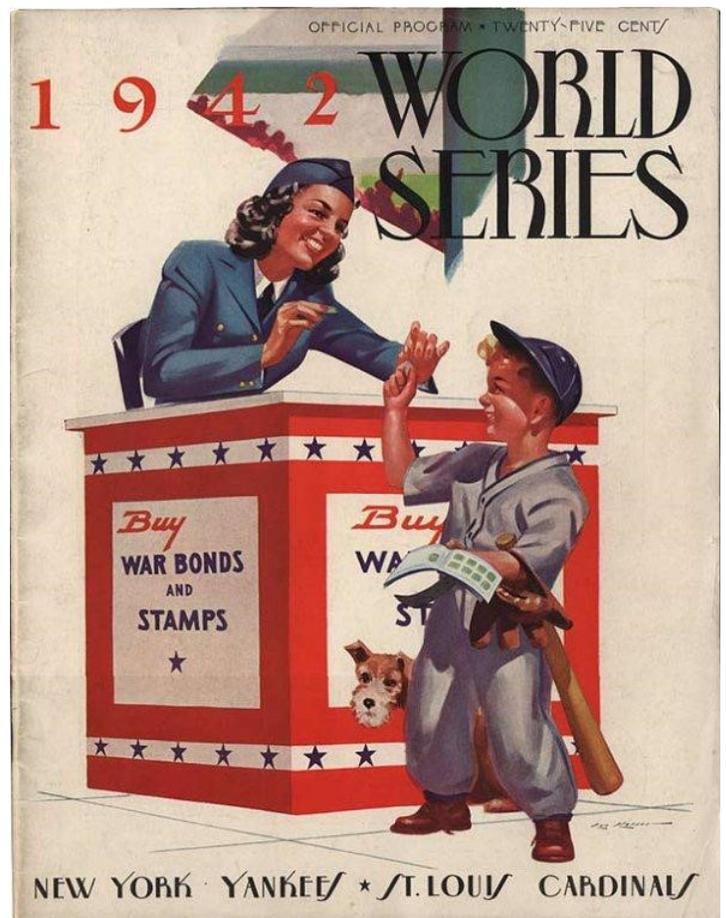
Joe DiMaggio started with the Yankees in 1936. He retired after the 1951 season.



Yankee Stadium during the 1943 World Series



Joe DiMaggio has his Sergeant Stripes sewn on his army uniform



This program from the 1942 World Series shows how the war was present in all aspects of life

## The Yankees, Raritan, & Baseball During WWII continued

bands could be found before some games started. At times, portions of the gate receipts were donated to the military. In fact, baseball during World War II started the tradition of *always* playing the National Anthem before the game. That tradition holds to this day in most sports. Before the war, only occasionally was the National Anthem played before sporting events.

During that era, Raritan Yankee fans could listen to the Yankee games on the radio—sometimes. While radio was the main entertainment medium of the day, all three local baseball teams had a few issues regarding their games being broadcast on the radio. While baseball games in other cities were regularly broadcast on the radio starting in the early thirties, the three New York teams balked at putting their games on the radio. They thought it would hurt ticket sales. It was not until 1939 that the three local teams decided that it was alright to broadcast their games. They soon found out that wanting to put games on the radio was one thing — finding and keeping a sponsor was another. In 1939, the Yankees were fortunate to obtain a sponsor. *General Mills*, the maker of the breakfast cereal *Wheaties*, stepped up to the plate and sponsored the Yankee games on the radio.

The years 1939 and 1940 were good for baseball fans. Raritan Yankees fans were fascinated to be able to listen to games that were going on 30 miles away. They would huddle close to the radio to hear the voice of now famous Yankee announcer Mel Allen. These good times lasted just two years, as in 1941 Wheaties withdrew sponsorship and no new sponsor could be found. So the Yankees spent the 1941 “regular season” off the air. This was a bad year for the fans to miss as that was the year of Joe DiMaggio’s 56-game hitting streak. Fortunately, the World Series was still on the radio, so the fans did not miss that. In 1942, a sponsor was again found and the Yankees fans again listened with delight. However, in 1943, the team “struck out” in obtaining a sponsor and the boys in pinstripes were off-the-air. Then in 1944, the Yankees were back on the radio, this time for good.

As for how the Yankees did during the war years ...

In 1941, the year just before the U.S. entered war, the Yankees won the World Series against the Brooklyn Dodgers, 4 games to 1. That made it a record eight wins in their last eight World Series appearances.

In 1942, with almost all of their regular team still intact they would win the pennant and then play the Cardinals in the World Series. They won the first game of the series, but the Cardinals, led by future hall of famers Stan Musial and Enos Slaughter, took the next four.

In 1943 the Yankees—with half their star players left—would again play the Cardinals who also had but half of their star players left. The Bronx Bombers would get revenge and take the series that year, 4 games to 1. It was the Yankees 10th World Series championship in 21 seasons. This series was the first to have a “World Series Highlight Film” made for it. The film was created as a gift to be shown to the troops fighting overseas. This film proved so popular with the troops (and other fans) that every year afterwards a World Series highlight film would be made.

By 1944, the Yankees were stripped of almost all of their star players—they finished third. That year the hapless St. Louis Browns, one of the worst franchises in baseball history, won their only pennant in their 52-year history. The Browns had benefitted from the war, for most other teams lost the majority of their stars, but many of the players on the Browns were classified “4-F”, unfit for military service.

In 1945, the final year of the war, the Yankees would finish fourth.

In those last two years of the war, 1944-45, Major League Baseball was a league with very little talent. as most of the top players were in the military. Some previously unknown ballplayers became the stars of the wartime baseball league. In 1945, a guy named Snuffy Stirnweiss had the highest batting average on the Yankees. Snuffy had not even been a starter before the war. Another Yankee, Nick Etten served as the prime example of the reduced talent of wartime baseball. Nick led the American League in home runs in 1944 with (just) 22. And in 1945, he led the American League in RBIs with 111. However, when the regular players came back in 1946, Nick was relegated to the bench and within two years he was in the minors never to return to the big leagues.

Baseball, during the war years, served its intended purpose as a much needed distraction from the war. While the attendance at Yankee games during the war years, like other teams, was a bit less, there was no substantial decrease. The Yankees had averaged 11,900 fans per regular season game during the years 1930-1941. During the war (1942-1945) the average regular season game was 10,400. The World Series games held at Yankee Stadium were a much different story. For those games, the park was packed with close to 70,000 fans. It was just after the war in 1946 that the average regular season attendance boomed to 29,000. Today, an average of 45,000 fans attend each Yankee game.

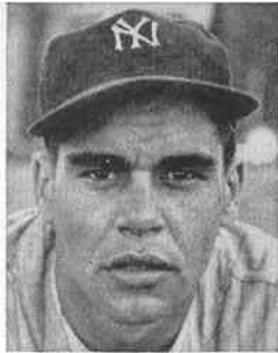
# Yankees Stars of 1941

## The years they served in the military



**JOE DI MAGGIO**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Center fielder. Born Nov. 25, 1914. Bats right. Throws right. Height 6 ft. Weight 195 lbs. Batted .352.

Army 1943, 44, 45



**CHARLEY KELLER**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Left fielder. Born Sept. 12, 1916. Bats left. Throws right. Height 5 ft. 10 in. Wt. 190 lbs. Batted .286.

Merchant Marines  
1944, part 1945



**TOMMY HENRICH**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Right fielder. Born Feb. 20, 1916. Bats left. Throws left. Ht. 6 ft. Wt. 170 lbs. Batted .307.

Coast Guard  
1943, 44, 45



**MARIUS RUSSO**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Pitcher. Born July 19, 1914. Bats right. Throws left. Ht. 6 ft. 1 in. Wt. 190 lbs. Won 14. Lost 8.

Army 1944, 45



**JOE GORDON**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. First baseman. Born Feb. 18, 1915. Bats and throws right. Height 5 ft. 11 in. Weight 175 lbs. Batted .281.

Army 1944, 45



**RED RUFFING**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Pitcher. Born May 4, 1904. Bats right. Throws right. Height 6 ft. Weight 200 lbs. Won 15. Lost 12.

Air Force 1943, 44



**LEFTY GOMEZ**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Pitcher. Born Nov. 26, 1910. Bats left. Throws left. Height 6 ft. 2 in. Weight 180 lbs. Won 3. Lost 3.

1942 Worked in war plant  
1943 Entertained Troops  
Overseas



**PHIL RIZZUTO**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Shortstop. Born Sept. 25, 1918. Bats and throws right. Ht. 5 ft. 6 in. Wt. 160 lbs. Batted .347. Kansas City 1940.

Navy 1943, 44, 45



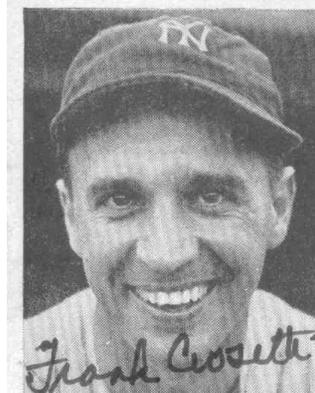
**RED ROLFE**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Third baseman. Born Oct. 17, 1908. Bats left. Throws right. Height 6 ft. Weight 170 lbs. Batted .250.

Did not serve  
(retired from baseball)



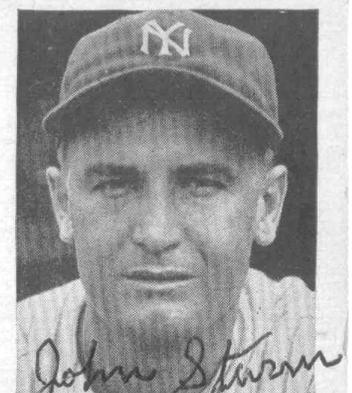
**BILL DICKEY**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Catcher. Born June 6, 1907. Bats left. Throws right. Height 6 ft. Weight 185 lbs. Batted .247.

Navy 1944, 45



**FRANK CROSETTI**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. Shortstop. Born Oct. 4, 1910. Bats right. Throws right. Ht. 5 ft. 10 in. Wt. 165 lbs. Batted .194.

Did not serve



**JOHN STURM**  
NEW YORK YANKEES. First baseman. Born Jan. 23, 1916. Bats left. Throws left. Ht. 6 ft. 1 in. Wt. 185 lbs. Batted .312. Kansas.

Army 1942, 43, 44, 45

## Too Young - Too Old - They still wanted to serve.

**George Sebestyansky** was a tall 14-year-old in his freshman year at Somerville High School. On the morning of January 2nd, 1944, he left his home at 6 Wall Street. His parents thought he was heading to school. However, he did not return that day, or the next day. The worried parents contacted Police Chief Lorenzo Rossi, who filed reports with the state police. There seemed to be no reason that he would leave. Things were fine at home and he probably had little or no money with him. The only possible clues to his whereabouts was that his brother John had just been inducted into the Navy and George seemed a bit resentful that his brother was joining the fight, but he was not. So the investigators took to examining all of the recent enlistments in the Navy and Merchant Marines. But his name was not found. His parents were, of course, extremely worried, but there was hope as George was type of kid that might pull a stunt like this. In March of 1944, he showed up at his home, much to his parent's relief. He was wearing a sailor suit. He told them how he lied about his age and was able to join the Navy. He had just completed boot camp. Now that everyone knew he was safe, one question remained. Was he going back to Navy? George's answer was yes – and after a seven-day stay at home, with his parent's blessing, he reported back to the Navy. An article about his deception appeared in the local newspaper, but that information never made it back to the Navy. He was assigned to *The USS Barton* – a destroyer. He served as a quartermaster – an assistant to the navigator. His ship soon went overseas and would see action in one of the crucial battles of the war. On D-Day, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, his ship blasted the beaches of Normandy as the Allied troops stormed ashore. For the next three days they continued to bomb German coastline positions. They also rescued 31 American soldiers from a sinking boat. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, George would see more excitement as during a brisk engagement with land-based German batteries in the Bombardment of Cherbourg. Here one enemy shell skipped off the water's surface, ripped through the side of the ship (above the water line), and lodged in the diesel generator room. Fortunately, the shell failed to detonate, and a repair party jettisoned it quickly. *The USS Barton* limped back to England for a temporary patch which allowed the ship to travel back to the U.S. for permanent repairs. By this time, the Navy had figured out George's true age and they took him off the ship. He was given an honorable discharge, as he had served well. George returned to Raritan and went back to school.

**Joe Navatto Jr.** was almost 40 years old. He wanted to serve his country so bad that he lied about his age so that he could join the army. At the time he was married with a 9-year-old daughter. Active locally, he was the Raritan Fire Chief. Joe told the army that he was younger than he actually was — enlisting early in 1943. He went off to basic training in Camp Wheeler in Georgia and gave it his best. Joe was an upbeat individual. His enthusiasm in boot camp was noticed by his much younger fellow soldiers. He was well-liked. During the training, the other guys called him “Happy”, but not in a bad way. (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was still a relatively new popular movie at the time.) From boot camp he wrote several letters back to Raritan's Tony Orlando. These showed both his enthusiasm and how his age affected him.

*“Tony, this is a tough life for an old man like me. About 95% of the boys here average about 22 years of age. ... We had our first 10 mile hike today. This is all sand country. You know how hard walking in sand is. We had a full pack, gas-mask, and rifle. Quite a load, but I managed to get back. My feet hurt like hell. Well that's part of the game.”*

In another letter he shows how he accepted military life:

*This infantry is plenty tough ... you can't be a chooser in the army. We have to go where they say and do as they say.*

In one letter he tells Tony one of his reasons for joining: *I do not have a son to give (to the army) so I had to serve myself.*

While Joe wanted to serve, his aching body gave him away. Toward the end of boot camp, the military authorities found out his real age. They thanked him for his patriotism, then sent him back to his family in Raritan.

**Al Gaburo**—In the fall of 1943, when John Basilone came home to Raritan for a couple months after being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, Al Gaburo drove John around to meet people and to talk with various organizations. This was in September of 1943—in the middle of the war. At the time, Al Gaburo was 35 years old, married with an infant son, and running a business. No one thought that he belonged in uniform, serving in the military. But Al, inspired by John Basilone's heroics, thought maybe he wasn't too old after all to join the service. His desire was to enlist in the Marine Corp., just like John Basilone. Al approached the Marine Corp to see if they would take him. He may have been older, but his college degree and business background made him a rare recruit. Thus, the Marines decided that he could be put to good use. So Al Gaburo, at age 35, to everyone's surprise would enter the Marine Corp. He was assigned to administrative positions of authority. Stateside, he was given the job of interviewing the new Marines to see what their skills were so they could be assigned to jobs that matched their experiences. Later, he would be in charge of the payroll for his battalion. When his unit moved overseas, he was given the important job of mail coordinator.

**Raritan guys wanted to serve their country,  
regardless of their age.**



**USS Barton**

**Where 14 year-old George Sebestyansky served.  
The ship bombed the beaches at  
Normandy on D-Day, June 6th, 1944.**



**George Sebestyansky  
Age 14**

6 Wall St.

**Just 14 years old, George disappeared from  
home one day to join the Navy. He lied about  
his age and they let him enlist.**

**—Newspaper Headlines —**

**Local Boy Missing From Home 3 Weeks**

**“Missing Boy”, 14, Home as Sailor**

**15-Year Old Raritan Boy Gets Discharged**



**Joe Navatto Jr.**

**Age 39**

60 First Ave.

**At age 39, Joe lied about his age to join the army.  
After he attended boot camp, the military found  
out his real age and sent him home.**



**Al Gaburo**

**Age 35**

500 Frelinghuysen Ave.

**He was 35 years old and had a new baby  
at home when he asked the Marines Corp  
if they would accept him.  
They were glad to have him.**

## Two Raritan Women Entertain the Troops

The 1940s was undoubtedly a male-dominated society, but many women still made contributions to the war effort. Two Raritan women would entertain the troops — one at a military base on the homefront, the other overseas in Europe.

Catherine Mastice was a young singer from Raritan who achieved critical acclaim and local fame with her beautiful singing voice. She could be heard singing in many places — on the radio, at special events, in the St. Ann's Choir, and at weddings. She even sung at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. When viewing the local newspapers of the 1940s, headlines can be found saying "Raritan Songbird Entertains Soldiers At Famous Canteen", "Catherine Mastice Guest Soloist at Recital", "Catherine Mastice to Sing on WAAT Broadcast". "Raritan Girl Announced Winner of \$4000 Scholarship." Mention the name Catherine Mastice to some senior citizens who lived in Raritan, especially those who attended St. Ann's Church in the 1940s, and many will give a passionate reference to what a wonderful singer she was. When the U.S. entered World War II, Catherine did her part on the homefront, as she turned her talents to entertaining the soldiers. A military base called Camp Kilmer had been built in Piscataway. This was a large facility that held tens of thousands of our troops. (Livingston Campus of Rutgers is at that location today.) At Camp Kilmer, Catherine sung weekly for the troops. The troops came by the hundreds to hear her sing.

On one occasion she traveled to New York City to sing at the famous club *The Stage Door Canteen*. This was a special club that was created to entertain soldiers on leave. Many celebrities of that era made appearances at this club. On the day she performed she was accompanied by a pianist who had played with Louis Armstrong and other popular big bands.

Catherine played a big role in what has been labeled "The Greatest Day in the History of Raritan". In September of 1943, after John Basilone had been awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor, he was brought home to a hero's welcome. Over 30,000 people attended. She sung two songs at the rally after the parade. The first was *God Bless America*. The other song was a special selection that had just recently been written by two Raritan men (Joe Memoli and Bill Jack) for John Basilone. It was called "Manila John". Catherine sung this new song with Manila John standing next to her. She said that at the end of the event John Basilone thanked her for singing.

When asked today what special memories does she have from her singing days, she fondly recalls singing for the servicemen at Camp Kilmer during World War II. She said "The boys were so enthusiastic. It gave me a wonderful feeling to sing for them".

Kaye Russell of 53 Canal Street was a 21-year-old dancer for the USO who performed for the troops overseas. Locally, she first appeared on the stage at the Cort Theatre when she was just eight. She had left high school in her junior year to perform with a prominent night club act in Baltimore. She was in a dance act with Kay George. When the war started, she joined up with the USO organization whose purpose was to entertain the troops. In the USO she was half of the tap dance team known as "The Step Sisters". She performed as many as five shows a day — for a total of over one-thousand shows. The USO show was called the "Loop the Loop" show. This group toured England — playing at air bases, hospitals, mess halls, and even in muddy fields.

Even as a performer, she was ever aware that the war was near. Once at a show, an air raid alarm had gone off. They were given permission to continue to perform, but it was under flashlights from the audience. Even while not performing and staying in London she was haunted by the V1 rockets launched by Germany against the British population. She had a close call, as one of these bombs exploded in the backyard of a home she was staying at. At the hospitals, she saw firsthand the horrible results of the war. Many soldiers had serious injuries and would need major operations.

On the whole, she said she enjoyed her experience as she had made a difference. She said "The boys are grateful just to see and speak to American girls. They crowd around us after each performance and ask questions just to hear us talk in our good-old American style." She said one of the biggest thrills is meeting boys from her part of the country back home. Overseas she would meet two Raritan men—John Cox and Allen Tonkin.

# Many Raritan Women Did Their Part for the War

## Catherine Mastice—Sung for the Troops at Camp Kilmer

— Newspaper Headlines —

Raritan Songbird to Sing at Famous Canteen

Catherine Mastice to be heard on the Radio



Somerset St.



## Kaye Russell—Toured with the USO—Entertaining the Troops in England



53 Canal Street

In the USO she was half of the tap dance team “The Step Sisters”.

She performed as many as 5 shows a day - for a total of over one thousand shows.

The USO show was known as the “Loop the Loop”

This group toured England playing at air bases, hospitals, mess halls, and even in muddy fields.



## Many Raritan Women Served in the Military



Helen Gilmore



Elizabeth Sepesi



Charlotte Glaser



Pauline Mesaros



Elizabeth Sebestyansky



Mary Gall



Amelia Hovan

# The Capture and Escape of Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr.

Born in 1912, Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. (JSF Jr.) was descended from a prominent family that had a long history in both Raritan and U.S. politics. His family home was located in Raritan, where the Burger King and PC Richard now stand. The home, built in 1874, was referred to as “The Old Mansion”.

His father, Joe Sr., had held a variety of government posts, including U.S. Senator from 1916-1922. Joe Sr. helped shape the Raritan economy with the establishment of a local dairy, *The Raritan Valley Farms*, in 1909. The dairy would prosper and continue in operation for more than half a century. In 1911, he also helped establish *The Raritan Valley Golf Club*. Later, he helped launch *The Raritan State Bank*.

During his tenure as U.S. Senator, Joe Sr. became friends with the then — President of the United States — Warren Harding, who visited the mansion in Raritan several times. On one visit, President Harding signed the treaty that officially ended World War I. A now-famous photo was taken of the historic signing. Joe Jr., then nine years old, appears in the photo, standing directly behind the President.

While he lived in Raritan, Joe Jr. did not attend the local schools — he was sent to private boarding schools where he came into contact with the upper echelons of society. One of his many friends was Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr., the fifth child of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt Sr. and his wife Eleanor.

Growing up, Joe Jr. was ever aware of his family’s commitment to military service. Paintings of his family were displayed proudly throughout the mansion. The earliest painting was of his great-great-grandfather who had commanded a company of artillery at the Battle of Princeton in the Revolutionary War. In the dining room, a portrait of his great-grandfather, a Brigadier General, who commanded a detachment of troops in *The War of 1812*. In the front hall was a portrait of his father when he served in the 101st cavalry during the Spanish-American war.

In 1927, when Joe Jr. was 15, the Frelinghuysen family moved out of their home in Raritan to Far Hills. The mansion had served them well, but as the years went by, the roads in front of the home, which had initially been lightly traveled, dirt roads, had evolved into main roads. Joe Sr. wanted a quiet location, which he found 20 minutes north in Far Hills. The timing of the move was just right, as The Somerville Circle would open in front of their property just two years after they moved. While the family no longer lived in Raritan, they remained an active part of the community. Joe Sr. was the President of *The Raritan State Bank* for many years and was actively involved with many Raritan organizations. The Frelinghuysen Mansion that they had moved out of was not sold and remained vacant. It was a landmark in Raritan, as it was still the biggest home in town, with the biggest lot, and had housed the most distinguished family in town.

Joe Jr. would attend college at Princeton from 1930—1934. Part of his curriculum there was military ROTC training. Upon graduation, he held the rank of Second Lieutenant. Joe Jr. began his business career working in the insurance business in New York City. In addition to his regular job, he was an officer in the Army Reserves. Therefore he went for military training several weeks per year. As the U.S. entered the war in 1941, he felt it was his duty to serve and was granted active full-time duty. By this time, he had a wife and young daughter.

His first overseas combat assignment was in the invasion of North Africa on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942. The insanity of ever changing alliances in war was evidenced in this battle. The U.S. and British landed in Tunisia, in an area that was controlled by the Vichy French — a group that had made alliances with Nazi Germany after the downfall of France in the early days of the war. On the first day of the U.S. landings, the Vichy French forces remained loyal to Germany and fought against the U.S.. Despite some casualties, the U.S. forces managed to move inland. After two days of battle, the U.S. made an agreement with the Vichy French to lay down their arms. The local people on the street then cheered the Americans, while waving both French and American flags. Joe Jr. found it crazy that the army of the crowds cheering them were trying to kill them the day before. With an alliance secured, the U.S. forces moved hundreds of miles across North Africa to engage the German Army. At this point in the war, the U.S. lacked experience and many errors were made. In one instance, JSF Jr. saw the aftermath and resulting rage when U.S. planes mistakenly strafed British ground forces, killing dozens of men on their own side.

**Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. was captured in November of 1942.  
He escaped from a POW camp in Italy on Sept. 23rd, 1943.  
After 7 weeks on the run, he made it back to rejoin the U.S. Army.**



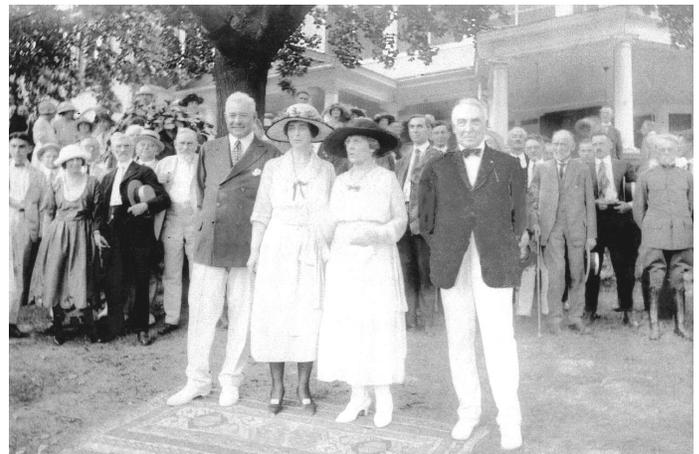
**Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr.**



**The Frelinghuysen Mansion was located where the PC Richard and Burger King are today. The stone pillars from the entrance way still remain.**



**Joe Jr., at age 9, stands behind President Warren Harding at the signing of the treaty to end World War I.**



**A glimpse of the mansion can be seen in this photo from 1921 of Joe Sr. and President Harding.**



**He escaped from this POW Camp. Camp 78 at Fonte d'Amore Italy**



**The only photo of the Frelinghuysen Mansion that is known to exist is this one from 1891.**

## The Capture and Escape of Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. continued

On Nov 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942, JSF Jr. took part in a reconnaissance mission in Tunisia. The higher ranking officer on the mission, like Joe, thought this assignment was insane. A small group, with little firepower, was being sent five miles ahead of their troops to scout out an enemy whose whereabouts and strengths were not even remotely known. His hunch proved correct, as their small group was ambushed by the well-prepared Germans. Several were killed — others, including Joe, were taken prisoner.

Fortunately for Joe, the German prisoner-of-war camps in 1942 were in Italy, as the Italians were, at the time, a reluctant ally of the Germans. While in the POW camps (he was in three) conditions were difficult. Food was two skimpy meals per day consisting of small portions of tomato soup, rice, and a roll. The constant hunger made the men very irritable and sometimes fights broke out. Conditions in the camps were made much more tolerable by supplies from the International Red Cross. Joe was given an overcoat and boots — both items were invaluable in his situation. Occasional Red Cross food packages were given to the men to supplement their meager rations. The Germans kept a good percentage of the food packages for themselves, but the prisoners did get some of them. The Red Cross even gave the POWs baseball bats, softballs, and some books for recreation.

While in the POW camp, Joe put his time to good use. He spent hours a day learning Italian. Some fellow prisoners helped him and there were books with Italian lessons available to him. Joe reasoned that learning Italian would be useful should he decide to escape.

In mid-1943, it was announced that Italy had surrendered. Not only had they surrendered, but they offered to switch sides and join forces with the U.S. in the war. Italy had been an ally of the Germans by the directive of the Fascist Dictator, Benito Mussolini, who was now in prison. Unfortunately, the Italian surrender did not impact the prisoners, as the Germans still held control of Italy and were not about to give the country up. The POWs care and treatment were now the responsibility of the Germans. The Italian guards had not been all that bad. In fact, as it became clear that Italy was going to surrender, the guards became much friendlier. Many Italian guards deserted the camp and never returned.

With the transition, Joe knew that now was the time to escape — before the Germans moved the prisoners to Germany where conditions were far worse. His camp did not have high cement walls, as they were expensive to construct and the consensus was that a prisoner was better off in the POW camp where food and shelter were available. Many camps had only wire fences for containing the prisoners. Some prisoners did escape, with disastrous results. Many were shot by German patrols and some died of exposure. Many escapees, after freezing and starving for a couple of days in the forest, came back to the POW camp where the smiling guards simply let them back in.

On the day that Joe planned to escape, a fellow prisoner helped him by dimming a light by the fence. Later that night, Joe and a fellow prisoner, Dick Rossbach, managed to slide under that part of the fence without being detected. That was the easy part. They would then head through the mountains, valleys, fields, and forests of Italy to get back to the U.S. lines. With no food or shelter and German patrols looking for them, it would be a difficult task. They would need help from the Italian people to make it back to their troops.

Many Italians, who hated the Germans, gave Joe and Dick assistance along the way at great risk to their own lives. Joe was very grateful to the Italian people. For they had little food themselves, yet were willing to share what they had with the Americans. He would later write "*It was beyond belief that these people, who were totally impoverished, were willing to share what little they had with strangers and foreigners.*"

One family in particular provided special assistance to Joe and Dick. They were Antonio and Rosa DiGiacomantonio who lived with their son Berardino and his wife Letizia, who was 9 months pregnant at the time. While traveling, Dick Rossbach had injured his leg and would need to rest for two weeks. During this period, the DiGiacomantonios provided them food and shelter at great risk to themselves. Joe and Dick spent a lot of time hidden in their home while Dick recovered from his injury.

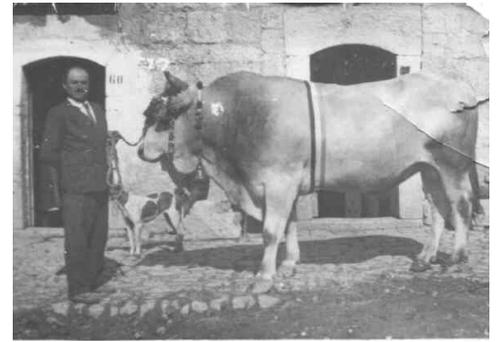
## The DiGiacomantonio family of Italy helped Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. avoid capture



**Antonio and Rosa  
DiGiacomantonio**



**Bernardino and Letizia  
DiGiacomantonio**



**Bernardino with a bull  
from his farm**



**Their home in Italy was among these rowhouses. This row of homes was a one hour walk from any road. The remoteness is what saved Joe and the family. As for the home and farmland in Italy that they left fifty years ago, they still own it. Letizia says that they had been through so much in the house - they could not part with it. Occasionally, a family member will return to stay at the old house. In recent years, they even had the house upgraded to add running water and electricity — luxuries they did not have in World War II.**

Bernardino was asked: “Why, when you had so little, did you share with strangers?”

*"We have a tradition in Italy of helping each other. My father did it, my grandfather did it and so I did it. That's the way it has always been. If I have a potato and there are two people, I divide it in half, half for you and half for me. If we gotta die, we die together."*

When asked “Did you understand the risk that you took?”

*"We knew the risk; we knew everything about that. God helped us with that. We were very fortunate that things worked out the way they did, because we took many chances."*



**Here is the landscape around their home in Montenerodomo, Italy (the Abruzzo region) that Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. traveled through to get back to the U.S. Army.**

## The Capture and Escape of Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Jr. continued

Joe was amazed by the generosity of the family. He wondered would we at home risk our lives and give what little we had to strangers. He worried for them, writing: "*The thought of what the Germans might do to these people if they were caught harboring prisoners sickened me.*"

Joe developed a special bond with the DiGiacomantonio family. He had learned Italian and was able to converse freely with them. One night while Joe was at the DiGiacomantonio house, Letizia had a baby boy, which they named after their grandfather Antonio. It may have been in the midst of war — and while hiding American soldiers that could result in their execution, but the family still celebrated this joyous occasion. An old bottle of wine was opened and Antonio, Berardino, and Joe shared a toast together.

The DiGiacomantonio family helped many soldiers avoid capture, as their home was along a natural route of escape. Berardino, in a 2011 interview, said that Joe Frelinghuysen stood out from the other soldiers in that Joe always showed tremendous concern for the safety of their family.

Before Joe & Dick continued on their journey, Dick would be re-captured by the Germans when they visited a nearby town. However, Joe managed to elude the Germans. After that, Joe decided that it was time to continue to move toward the Allied forces. He would soon be joined by three other soldiers, all with the same goal. Two Italians came forward and agreed to act as their guides through the forests and mountains. He said goodbye to the DiGiacomantonio family. After a week, and with the assistance of the two brave guides, they connected with the British Army on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1943.

By this time, Joe was in terrible shape. He was sent to an American Hospital in North Africa where he stayed for three weeks. Then, in mid-December of 1943, the U.S. Army needed a courier to deliver a critical package to Washington D.C. They felt Joe had earned a trip home and selected him to deliver it. When he arrived in the states, he was again put in the hospital for a few days. There his wife came to see him in a joyous reunion. He soon recovered from his injuries, but the war was still on -- and Joe was re-assigned overseas to the Pacific, where he spent the last 18 months of the war. As for the fate of Dick Rossbach, he survived a beating from the Germans and then spent 20 months in a POW camp. After the war, Joe and Dick would do business together in New York City.

Following the war, Joe kept in touch with the DiGiacomantonios. In 1956, he returned to Italy to reunite with them. To show his gratitude, he would help Berardino and his family immigrate to the U.S.. At the time, the process of getting someone legally into the U.S. was a difficult one. The U.S. Immigration Service required a reason to grant a person entry into the country. That reason could be that someone had specialized skills that could not be filled by an American worker. JSF knew what to do. He was the manager of his family owned dairy, *The Raritan Valley Farms*. Remembering that Berardino made excellent cheese, JSF advertised a job for a cheese maker who was familiar with the cheese-making process of the Abruzzi region in Italy. Berardino could fulfill this requirement and thus he was granted entry into the U.S. in 1958, settling in Raritan. After a few years, the remainder of the family would be granted entry to the U.S to join him. In 1969, the family moved to 308 Bell Avenue in Raritan, where they remain to this day. Joe became a cherished friend, who visited them every month until he fell ill before his death in 2005.

**After the war Joe S. Frelinghuysen Jr. helped  
the DiGiacomantonios immigrate to the U.S.  
They came to Raritan where they remain as of 2014.**



**Their home on Bell Avenue  
in Raritan today**



**Berardino and Letizia in 2014**

Berardino is now 100 years old and Letizia is 90.  
They live on Bell Avenue in Raritan.

After their war time experience,  
they take nothing for granted.

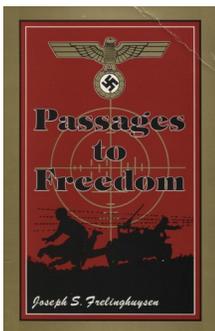
Letizia says that "Living in peace is a blessing.  
It is wonderful not to live in fear."



**In 1956 Joe Frelinghuysen Jr.  
returned to Italy to thank  
Berardino and his family.  
He then helped them  
immigrate to the U.S.**



**In 2011 they were the special guests in  
The John Basilone Memorial Parade.**



Joe Frelinghuysen Jr.  
wrote a book  
about his escape:

***Passages to  
Freedom***

## Tony Orlando - A True Patriot

Raritan tavern owner Tony Orlando (1892 - 1979) is remembered for the thousands of letters and hundreds of packages that he sent to the Raritan GIs during World War II. He was born in Angri, Italy in the province of Salerno. In 1902, he came to this country with his mother and seven other children. They first settled in Newark, and then they came to Raritan in 1909.

Tony would meet and marry a local Raritan girl, Anna Barone, who was also born in Italy. As a young man he worked at his father-in-law's hotel, which was located on Somerset Street in Raritan. Together with his wife they would have 10 children. The four boys were named Anthony, Matthew, Joseph, and Al. The six girls were Ann, Rose, Tess, Joan, Catherine, and Mary. (Today one of his daughters, Ann Schaub, still lives in Raritan.)

After working for his father-in-law for several years, Tony started his own tavern business when Prohibition ended in 1933. He acquired the first borough liquor license and converted a vacant church that stood at 19 Wall Street into what he named *The Centennial Tavern*. The family lived in the upstairs of the tavern.

The tavern had two sections, a bar area in the front and a banquet room in the back. Raritan residents could stop in the bar area any day for a beer and some food. Their special occasions were held in the banquet room. For decades, his place served as Raritan's only banquet hall, hosting weddings, communions, and birthdays.

Tony Orlando's idea to dedicate himself to supporting the Raritan boys serving in World War II began just after the U.S. entered the war. He was at church one day when he overheard a woman crying while praying aloud asking God to see that her son would return safely from the war. He was very moved by this. Thus he decided then that he would do whatever he could to help the boys in the service while they were away from, home fighting for our freedom.

His Centennial Tavern soon became a tribute to the local boys fighting the war. He decorated the walls with the pictures of the Raritan guys who were serving in the military. In addition to the military portraits, many letters, postcards, and pictures from distance places were displayed on the walls at the tavern. One special section was for the Raritan guys who were killed in action. The inscription above those photos read "In Memory of the Boys Who Made the Supreme Sacrifice". That section would grow to 24 Raritan guys. For each of these heroes who perished, Tony made a special framed portrait that he gave to the family members.

Tony started sending letters to the Raritan boys at a rate of several letters a day. It was estimated that he sent over two thousand letters to the local servicemen overseas. In addition to the letters, Tony also sent hundreds of packages. To assist in this, Tony organized *The Raritan Victory Club* which help collect and box the packages. The items sent included cigarettes, snacks, and much needed supplies. To the soldiers overseas these packages were a godsend, as life in wartime had few comforts. A few extra smokes, a pack of nuts, or a bag of candy brightened up their day. The soldiers wrote back, expressing their thanks for the "swell" package they received. Five hundred of these letters to Tony Orlando survive today. Some of the packages sent overseas went to two of Tony's sons who were in the military. Private Matthew Orlando was with Patton's Third Army in Germany — while Seaman First Class Anthony Jr. served with an amphibious unit on a ship in the South Pacific.

When soldiers on leave came to *The Centennial Tavern*, their drinks were "on the house". Tony would say years later "While they were serving their country, I could at least serve them a beer." The veterans loved the red-carpet treatment and often stopped by the tavern, not just for a beer, but to talk with Tony, who many came to admire as a father-figure.

Tony would say about the boys during WWII, "I pray for them every day, as if they were my own children, and so I have come to think of them as my sons."

One of his accomplishments was to establish a special Memorial Day Mass to honor those that were killed in the war. This traditional mass was celebrated for decades after the war.

When World War II officially ended on Tuesday evening, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Tony welcomed everyone to his place for a tremendous celebration. Eleven months later, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946, when all the boys arrived home from overseas, Tony and *The Raritan Victory Club* threw a homecoming party for 675 Raritan GIs. The party was held on Duke's Estate. They hired professional caterers and a six-piece band. The boys enjoyed themselves with a day of fun activities such as baseball, greased-pole climbing, and a friendly tug-of-war contest between the Army and the Navy. A photographer was hired and many good pictures of this event were taken.

# Tony Orlando sent hundreds of packages overseas to the Raritan GIs



In addition to the bar area, the Centennial Tavern had a banquet area. Many wedding receptions, communions, and birthday parties were held there.

**Tony Orlando owned The Centennial Tavern in Raritan. It was located at 8 Wall Street.**

Today, we are paying tribute to one of Raritan's most deserving and humble citizens, Tony Orlando. Tony has always played a leading role in Raritan affairs. Perhaps the most important role that remains most dear in the hearts of most people is the part that Tony played during World War II, for it was during this period that he devoted most of his spare time to keeping close touch with the many boys from Raritan who had been called to the colors. He managed to write 6 or 7 letters each day to men stationed in all parts of the world. To quote one of Tony's old familiar phrases "I pray for them every day as if they were my own children, and so I have come to think of them as my sons."

In the interior of Tony's well known Centennial tavern, one could see the magnificent tribute to our fighting forces, about 1000 letters, postcards, and pictures from nearly every state in the union and from every theater of war. Tony had a special red, white, and blue frame made for over 260 portrait photographs sent in by the boys or their families and a specially constructed "memoriam" plaque for the boys killed in action which held the place of honor in the picture-letter- display, with the following inscription "In Memory of the Boys Who Made the Supreme Sacrifice."

Every Christmas Tony sent out almost a hundred gifts to his friends in the service. He paid for each out of his own pocket and did his own wrapping and mailing. When a serviceman on furlough stopped in at the Centennial, drinks were on the house. Not content with just these "little things" Tony made possible an event which he considers the most important thing in his humble life. Each year on Memorial Day he arranges a special mass for the boys who made the supreme sacrifice.

For all those things we take this opportunity to salute you Tony and may God bless you always.

**The above is from the program from a dinner that was held in Tony's honor.**

The Raritan soldiers wrote back to Tony to say thanks.

**Larry Carnevale** (31 Gaston Avenue) had this to say: *"I received the swell package you sent me and I can't express in words my appreciation... It isn't only the package that made me feel good, but the feeling behind it. I know you people home are really doing your part and take it from me, you are doing a swell job."*

**Dan Memoli** (11 Doughty Street) - expressed his surprise at receiving a package from home: *"Yesterday at mail call I was handed a package. I had not requested a package ... so you can realize my surprise when the mail clerk handed me this one. I want to therefore thank you at this time for your thoughtfulness."*

**Rocco Pomponio** said this: *"I am very happy to hear of you forming the Raritan Victory Club for us. You said the club was started with ten members and now you have one hundred and ten members. That's really wonderful. And God bless you, no one will ever forget you because you really doing your share for the boys in the service."* In another letter, Rocco said he wanted to do something special for Tony: *"I'd like to thank you again for all you are doing for the boys. And just for that I'm going to kill a Jap for you."*

**John Kraly** showed that all Raritan soldiers were on the distribution list for packages not just Tony's friends: *"Just a few lines to let you know that I received your Christmas Package. It was an unexpected surprise, but most welcome. I don't know just who you are but your thoughtfulness is appreciated."*

**John Cox** (32 Anderson Street), said: *"Many thanks for the card, letter, and Christmas Package. I assure you all three are deeply appreciated. I realize how busy you are writing to the boys from town who are now fighting in all corners of the globe. They realize it too, and will never forget it."*

## Tony Orlando - A True Patriot ... continued

Years later, on June 30th, 1957, Raritan honored Tony Orlando for his contributions to the Raritan GIs during World War II. Six hundred friends, along with family members, gathered at *The Martinsville Inn* for a testimonial dinner in his honor. One speaker at the event, former County Judge George Allgair summed it up, “*We are here today paying respect to a humble man because we all love him. The work he has done is certainly worthy of much praise and this turnout is a real tribute to a man who has done so much for the welfare of others*”. At the dinner, Tony was presented with a portrait of himself. Toward the end of the dinner Tony took to the microphone to address the crowd. His simple words of thanks brought tears to the eyes of many former GIs who remembered his letters and packages that kept up their morale during the dark days of war when their freedom and survival were at stake.

Tony retired in the late 1960s and the tavern was sold to the Morella family who lived on Bell Avenue in Raritan. The tavern continued on for several years, but in February 1975, a fire destroyed the building. No one was injured, but a landmark in Raritan was gone. A home was rebuilt on the property. Today, there is no hint that a tavern, especially one that is such an important part of Raritan’s history, was once there.

### Remembering Tony Orlando

The collection of World War II letters that were written to Tony were made public by the Orlando family three years ago. Only two servicemen who had written to him were known to be alive at that time. This author was glad to be able to talk with both of them. One is **Michael DeCicco** who served in the Navy during the war. Michael was at Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the day of the Japanese attack. Serving aboard, *The USS Helena*, he helped fight off the sneak attack. Early in 1942, Michael was granted a 30-day survivor’s leave and was able to fly home. Since he had been at Pearl Harbor and he was the first soldier to return home from the war, he received a lot of attention. Tony Orlando, in one of his first acts for the Raritan GIs, held a dinner in his honor at *The Centennial Tavern*. Michael recalled Tony Orlando to be a wonderful man. Saying he truly had the interests at heart for all the Raritan guys in the service. He feels fortunate to have known him.

The other Raritan GI whose letters are found in the Tony Orlando collection is **Joe Sian**. Joe served in the Navy on *The USS Pasadena* which saw action in the Pacific. Joe Sian was good friends with Tony Orlando. They often wrote to each other. He says Tony was “One hell of a nice guy. Everybody liked him. A great old man.” Over the decades, Joe hung out at the tavern quite often. He said “The Centennial Tavern was always a good deal.” Joe also recalled the picnic that Tony had for the servicemen in 1946 on Duke’s property. He remembers how hundreds of Raritan guys were there having a good time with activities such as pole climbing and tug-a-war.

Today’s mayor, **Jo-Ann Liptak** said “I remember Mr. Orlando as a kind, generous, and gentle man. I was best-friends with his granddaughter Trina DeCastro when we were in the 6th grade. After school we would often go to the bar and drink soda and eat pizza. He was so delighted to have us there because he loved to dote on his granddaughter.” She also recalled the social aspect of the tavern as she says “It was THE place to go after the 6th-grade dances at the Washington School.”

**John Pacifico** recalled Tony Orlando. “He was a very kind, generous man. A true gentleman who was outgoing, respected, and personable. Everybody who ever went to his tavern was welcome. No one had an un-kind word to say about him.” Pacifico also recalled how *The Centennial Tavern* played a vital role in the lives of Raritan residents, as its banquet room served countless events. Communion, weddings, and other special occasions were held there for decades. It was the only banquet hall in Raritan. John further points out that we need a place like that in town today.

Today a road in Raritan, Orlando Drive, is named after Tony Orlando. It serves as a small tribute to a man who made such a difference. Always a modest man, he had a simple philosophy, as he was once quoted, “*If you do some good and you brag about it, it’s no good at all.*”

# The Walls at The Centennial Tavern had Photographs of the Raritan Servicemen

One special section of the wall was for those that were killed in the war →



Tony's wall was a local landmark, which took on a special level of significance during the war. Photos of the wall appeared in the local newspapers. Every Raritan guy serving his country was proud to have his picture on Tony's wall. However, getting a photo taken while in the military was not that easy in the 1940s, as the following quotes from letters demonstrate:

**John Baglioni** (25 Wall Street) was trying to get a photo, but there were many restrictions in the military. He wrote *"I will send a picture of myself as soon as I can. They don't allow cameras in camp."*

**Andy Bayus** (59 E Somerset Street) was very concerned, as he was striking out trying to get a photo: *"About that picture you want of me. I cannot get it up here as when we go to town the stores are closed."* But he eventually succeeded, writing to Tony: *"I sent my picture home and my sister will give you one as soon as they arrive ... I only had six of them made."*

**Joe Ruggieri** (24 W Somerset Street) complemented the famous wall: *"I was surprised to find out how many photographs you have obtained of local boys now serving in the armed forces. Your collection is tremendously large and it must be completely gratifying to you."*

**Michael Pellechio** (17 Raritan Avenue) wanted to look as good as possible on the wall, so he sent an updated photo with a note: *"I guess I told you about the picture on the wall at your place. I didn't quite like it, as it was taken while I was a rookie at camp. This new photo I am sending you isn't so hot but I think it is just a little better than the last."*

**Mike Troisi**, while stationed in Belgium, was proud to have his photo on the wall: *"I just found out that you have my picture on your famous wall as I just got word from my girl as she was in your place Christmas Night for a drink."*

**Rocco Pomponio**, stationed in Germany, saw the article about the photo display wall while in Germany and said: *"I was happy to see all the pictures you have in your place. That's really something to be proud of. You are the only guy in Raritan who could think of something like that. Everybody will remember you."*

# Basilone earns The Congressional Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal

At the start of the war, the U.S. was unprepared to fight. After the pounding at Pearl Harbor, the U.S. lost the Philippines and various islands in the Pacific. But by October of 1942, they were beginning to become a fighting force that could take on the Japanese. American soldiers on a Pacific island called Guadalcanal had managed to capture the island from a small group of Japanese construction workers who were completing an airstrip. The Japanese were humiliated to lose this island. They were determined to recapture it. They poured thousands of soldiers and weapons onto the island. The U.S. did the same. The opposing armies would clash several times on the island. At one of these decisive battles, a Marine, John Basilone, would rise to the occasion performing heroics that would become legendary.

On October 24th, 1942, the Marines were guarding the now finished airstrip they named Henderson Field. The Japanese had amassed a force at the edge of the airfield and were ready to attack. At 10 PM, the Japanese began their attack. John Basilone and his men were dug in. The "field phone" rang. As John answered the phone he heard trouble. It was one of his men from a post closer to the front line. He screamed a simple message "The Japs are coming."

John Basilone took control, he turned to his men and said "All right you guys, don't forget your orders. The Japs are not going to get through to the field. I'm telling you that goes, no matter what!" They could soon hear the Japanese cutting the barbed wire. Unfortunately, they could not see the Japanese in the dark as they had hoped. Their first line of defense, the barbed wire, was already falling. John set the strategy for his unit. He told his men to let the enemy get within 30 yards and then "let them have it." They fired at the first group of attacking Japanese, successfully wiping them out.

This first charge was only the beginning of the overall enemy attack. They charged several more times. The carnage and dead bodies started to pile up. John later said "One thing you got to hand the Japanese, they were not afraid to die, and believe me, they did." In addition to frontal charges, the Japanese lobbed mortar shells and threw hand grenades. One Japanese soldier got to within 5 feet of Basilone — here John used his pistol, killing the attacker.

Eventually this attack took its toll. John, while manning the left two machine guns, heard a loud explosion come from the right setup of the machine guns. After that, the machine guns that had previously been rattling constantly had fallen silent. Moments later, one soldier from the right side crawled over to John Basilone and informed him that both right guns were knocked out and that the crew was all dead or injured. The horror of battle hit John hard. He thought My God, not the men that I had trained and was so proud of.

John could not pause to grieve, but instead knew he had to get to the knocked out guns to see if he could get them working. He took some remaining men and crawled through the rain-soaked jungle toward the damaged gun-post. The path across brought them to an area where one of their artillery shells had previously exploded in the middle of an enemy patrol. There was mutilation everywhere and the stench was almost unbearable.

Before arriving at the knocked-out gun-post, a couple of Japanese were encountered. John urged his men to hang back. He jumped out, spraying the enemy, killing them with his Browning machine gun. However, his arm was burnt from the hot gun. While the Browning gun can be fired held in a soldier's arms, the gun works best when held in a support triangle, as the heat can be a hazard to the shooter.

When they arrived at the right gun position, John saw that five men were dead, and two were injured. The two injured men were still holding their guns ready to fire. Before John could get a look at the knocked out guns, the Japanese attacked again. Using the gun John brought over and their rifles, they held back the attack. This time some of the Japanese attackers tried to sneak in quietly, crawling low in the high grass. John spotted them and laid on the ground firing his gun accurately through the grass, as he would later say "mowed down the crawlers." Beating back that attack gave them a few minutes of quiet to inspect the damaged guns. The first gun was beyond repair. The second gun had a chance. There was no light to aid in examining the damaged gun. John would have to troubleshoot the problem in the dark, by feeling the parts to find out what was causing the gun not to fire. The Marines had to learn how to assemble their guns blindfolded. John was expert at this. As he worked to find the problem, the Japanese could be heard lining up for another charge. John found the problem and yelled to his guys "the head spacing is out of line." One of his men thought that means the gun is not repairable, but John quickly had the gun working again. As soon as it was back in action, the enemy charged. With the extra gun now working, Basilone and his unit easily beat back the Japanese attack.

The enemy was soon charging again. Fortunately for John and his remaining men, the Japanese battle tactics were very similar each time. They would group up and could usually be seen and heard doing so. Then they would charge, yelling "Banzai Banzai". This allowed the Marines to anticipate the attack and counter effectively. John and his men started to yell Banzai back, along with a few choice American words.

Through holding back the attacks, John wondered quietly to himself how long can they keep this up? At one point later in the heat of battle, one of his men had the same worries and yelled "Sarge how long can we keep this up?" John briefly had his doubts too, and wondered "is this where it ends, out here in the jungle, thousands of miles from home." They were getting groggy and many thoughts were going through their minds. John wondered about the dead enemy soldiers in front of him. Did they have families? Then he would switch his thoughts to how those men were not human. They're just something the earth vomited up and his job was to put them back down with lead.

There was no water, as their canteens had been hit by shrapnel. Their mouths were so dry and dusted with dirt that it changed their appearance. John said "We had lost our resemblance to the human race." No reinforcements were coming. At one point the guns were getting too hot and there was no water to pour into the cooling jacket, so John instructed his men to urinate into the shaft to cool the guns down. It worked. The attacks kept coming, even in a heavy downpour of rain. John told two of his remaining uninjured soldiers, Powell and Evans, to keep the heavy machine guns loaded. John would roll to one machine gun and fire until it was empty, then roll over to the other one that had been loaded while he was firing the first one. When that was empty, he went back to the first gun which had now been reloaded. This strategy was used against the remaining Japanese attacks.

**At Guadalcanal on the night of Oct 24th-25th, 1942  
In The Battle for Henderson Field  
Raritan's John Basilone heroically held off a Japanese attack  
For his actions, he was awarded *The Congressional Medal of Honor***

**Newspaper Headlines (all front page)**

**The New York Times**

*"Slew 38 Japanese in One Battle:  
Jersey Marine Gets Honor Medal"*

**The Star Ledger**

*"His Gun Slew So Many, He Had to Move"*

**The Newark Evening News**

*"Raritan Hero Got Action He Sought in Marines -  
John Basilone, Who Found Army 'Too Tame',  
Wins Congressional Medal for Valor."*

**The Plainfield-Courier News**

*(now The Courier News)  
"Raritan Marine Gets Top Medal,  
Killed 38 Japs on Guadalcanal"*

**The Raritan Valley News**

*"Congressional Medal Given to Basilone  
for Heroism as Guadalcanal Marine"*



**John Basilone lived at 113 First Ave. which was at the corner of First Ave. and 202. Today, the home is gone, a Shell Station sits on the property.**

COMPLETE NEWS OF  
RARITAN  
BRIDGEWATER  
HILLSBOROUGH  
BRANCHBURG

RARITAN VALLEY  
NEWS

PUBLISHED  
EVERY  
THURSDAY  
3  
CENTS  
PER  
COPY

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VOL. VIII; No. 28 RARITAN, N. J., THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 1943 EIGHT PAGES

**Congressional Medal Given Basilone For Heroism As Guadalcanal Marine**

The coveted Congressional Medal of Honor — the highest decoration ever won by a fighting man — has been awarded to Sgt. John Basilone of First Ave., a veteran of Guadalcanal. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Salvatore Basilone, who have two other sons in uniform.

A short letter from the hero to his family brought word Monday of the award. He is now "somewhere where I can enjoy life," in the Pacific area, recovering from his tough fight "on the Canal." He was with the first wave of Marines to invade the Jap-held territory and one of the last to leave. John sent his family a picture showing him with the medal around his neck. Alongside is an unidentified buddy who wears the Navy

Cross. Apparently the picture was taken soon after the medals were given the boys.

The Congressional Medal of Honor, established in 1861, is granted to persons "who shall distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives, above and beyond the call of duty."

Basilone's exploits were portrayed over the "Halls of Montezuma" program over the Mutual

coast-to-coast hookup Saturday night. It told how he saved a group of Marines from certain death by killing scores of Japs who had the Americans cornered.

He joined the Army seven years ago and transferred to the Marines in July, 1940. He visited his family two years ago.

Johnny dismissed the award with one sentence. He devoted the rest of his letter to questions about members of his family, especially his two brothers, Alphonse and

(Continued on Page 8)

**DR. R. REEVES HEADS GAS DEFENSE COURSE**

Dr. Richard F. Reeves of Foothill Rd. was chairman of a course in gas protection given Saturday and Sunday at Princeton University to members of civilian defense units. He is chairman of decontamination and demolition of the Raritan-Bridgewater Defense Council.

The course was sponsored by the Princeton section of the New Jersey State Gas School, Frank Dombroski of Enderne and Robert Conn of Park Ave. also attended.

**80 Jobless Found Here; 'Drive Successful'-Davis**

With more than half of the town canvassed, the hunt for workers to "bring very satisfactory results", Charles A. Davis, director of the War Manpower Commission, announced last night after surveying reports from interviewers who visited the homes.

A total of 80 workers for both essential and non-essential jobs have been located here to help the critical labor shortage. The canvassers still have to cover about one-third of the town and the 100 mark may be reached, Mr. Davis said.

The house-to-house canvass here is the first search to be made in Somerset municipalities. Since the majority of Raritan residents are already in war work, Mr. Davis said he was surprised that 80 could be found to help the labor situation. He said he anticipated only a handful and admitted he was "much surprised and happy" over the results.

**Somerville Next**

"It indicates what we can expect in the other municipalities, for Raritan has a very high percentage in war industries", Mr. Davis said. Somerville will be

**MOTHER, SON DROWN AT HEADGATES**

A young Bradley mother gave her life in a vain attempt to save her young son from drowning at the Headgates Monday afternoon. Both bodies were recovered in 12 feet of water.

Mrs. George Wilkens, 30, left her home near Old York Rd. with her son George Jr., 3, in bathing suits to escape the high temperature in the river. The mother noticed the boy slip off the concrete ledge of the dam into deep water. She dove to rescue him.

Apparently the mother struck her head on a second underwater

**THIRD CHURCH PASTOR**



The Rev. Eugene Osterhaven, who is filling the pulpit at the Third Reformed Church during the military leave of the Rev.

**BASILONE HONORED**  
(Continued from Page 1)

George.

Alphonse joined the Army in October, 1941 and has been in Iceland since September. George has been in the Marines since August and has been on furlough from New River, N. C.

Marine Johnny received a promotion on Guadalcanal and was made platoon sergeant. He wrote on a scrap of paper taken from the Japs and said re "enjoyed life" there and said he was sorry about the poor writing facilities.

When they felt they could not keep up the pace any longer, the Japanese would retreat and regroup. The enemy would then predictably charge in groups of 15 or 20. Basilone would let them get close and then mow them down. As they were hit, their screams filled the night. Another Japanese soldier managed to sneak up to their position and jumped right at them with a knife. Again, John got him with his pistol. The pistol would see more action through the night, as it was the best weapon for those who crept in close by crawling. Some grenades exploded close to John and his fellow Marines, but none hit them. It was a long night, and some of the early kills started to decompose. It brought on a nasty stench.

Later in the night, Basilone saw an incredible site. The Japanese had taken their dead and piled them up high in front of them to form a wall to protect the living Japanese soldiers, who set up their machine guns behind the pile of their dead comrades. To counter the new enemy "wall", John onetime decided to move his position to get a better angle at the enemy. Later, in a break in the fighting, John sent one of his men to go push over the wall of dead bodies.

At about 3 AM, his remaining uninjured men, Garland and Powell, who had been loading the machine guns, informed Basilone that they were almost out of ammunition. This came as a surprise, as initially they had what they thought was plenty of ammunition, but this intense battle had depleted their supply. Basilone thought "what a hell of a way to go, no ammo." He said to his two men, "Hold on, I'll bring you back some ammo." Garland yelled "what are you going to do, go back for shells?" That was exactly what he had planned. The Marines had stored ammunition about 100 yards away. However, this would be a difficult 100 yards. The battlefield was covered with enemy soldiers. By this point, some Japanese were scattered about. He told his men to hold the position with the remaining ammunition for the machine guns and their rifles and pistols. John crawled through the jungle until he reached a path and then got up and ran. Bullets flew off over his head and grenades exploded around him, but he continued - determined to reach the hidden ammo dump. When he finally arrived at the dump, Basilone felt like it was a miracle he made it there. The ammo dump was dug into the ground, he jumped in. The Japanese had not located it, so the supplies were still there. The bullets were stored in cartridge belts. John threw six of them over his soldier. The image of John with the cartridge belts over his shoulder would inspire the design for the "Basilone Statue" and a portrait of him. (The statue has him shirtless, but the portrait has him with his shirt on.) The total weight of the belts was around 100 pounds. As he started back to his men, bullets were whizzing all around him again. Fortunately, the darkness provided him enough protection to avoid getting hit. John made it back with the much needed ammunition. Basilone later said "How I got through, I'll never know."

When Basilone arrived back, he found another challenge. One machine gun had been smashed. John took parts from another knocked out gun and fixed it quickly. Soon after he had repaired the machine gun, the enemy began another attack. This attack was more intense than the previous ones. John sensed that the Japanese must really want Henderson Field badly to waste all that manpower. To combat this new charge, John took the gun off the tripod and flattened it to the ground to get a better aim at the attackers. His helmet got in his way, so he ripped it off to allow himself more effective firing. He again used his standard firing technique where he would roll between two machine guns, firing one while his men reloaded the other. The Japanese came as if hypnotized -- the slaughter was appalling. John told family "the enemy was climbing over their dead comrades and seemed eager to throw themselves in my line of fire. It was unbelievable that life could be so cheap."

The Japanese attacks got weaker and weaker, finally ending around sunrise. The daylight revealed a scene of utter carnage on the ground. Hundreds of bodies lay dead in front of the American positions. In some spots, dead bodies were on top of each other. The debris of war was everywhere. Broken weapons, ammunition containers, and pieces of barbed wire.

They counted thirty-eight dead Japanese surrounding one of Basilone's defensive positions. This number would be later used in the headlines of the newspapers. The real number that John Basilone killed himself could never be determined. John's commanding officer Lewis "Chesty" Puller was making the rounds that morning, talking to the surviving soldiers. When he saw John, he said "I heard you came back for ammunition, good work." Later it would be Puller who recommended Basilone, and only Basilone, for *The Congressional Medal of Honor*.

The Japanese attack had been held off. These Marines, along with Army troops, had shown tremendous tenacity and courage to hold off a determined enemy. The battle at Guadalcanal held much significance. Up to that time, the Japanese had won each land battle, taking territory as they pleased. Guadalcanal was the turning point of the war. There would still be more fighting on Guadalcanal after the battle for Henderson Field that night, but the outcome was certain. The Japanese retreated from Guadalcanal in February, 1943. From that point on, they were no longer on the offensive, but on the defensive, trying to hold the islands and countries they had conquered.

## Basilone would say that his Medal of Honor belonged to all the guys who fought that night at Guadalcanal



**John Basilone shows his medal to his buddies.**

### **Basilone's Medal of Honor Citation**

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 of October 1942. While the enemy was hammering at the Marine's defensive positions, Sgt. Basilone, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. Basilone's sections, with its "gun crews", was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrives.

A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. Basilone, at great risk to his own life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



When John Basilone was awarded *The Congressional Medal of Honor*, many of the Raritan guys wrote home about how proud they were of him. They were also thrilled by the large welcome home parade that was held for Basilone in September of 1943.

**Rocco Pomponio** wrote:

*"Well Tony it's sure nice to have a soldier like Basilone that comes from Raritan. He sure put Raritan on top. I hope that we could all do as much and get this war over with. I wish I was at home to see it all. I bet it was a beautiful parade. I also get The Raritan Valley News and I sure got a thrill out of reading all about Basilone."*

**John Kraly** added: *"I read about the Basilone fellow in The Raritan Valley News. I know he deserves plenty of credit because I know what he was up against, out here, and it makes me feel glad to know we both came from the same town."*

**Larry Carnevale** (31 Gaston Avenue) said: *"I guess all of the fellows who left Raritan have heard of Johnny Basilone where ever they may be. It's really something to brag about down here. He's a great guy."*

**Stanley Waida** (119 W. Somerset Street) wrote: *"I see by the papers and also in Life Magazine about Raritan's hero Johnny Basilone. My hats off to him and the many others like him in this war. He sure did a wonderful job."*

# The Welcome Home Parade for John Basilone

When John Basilone was ordered home after being awarded *The Congressional Medal of Honor*, the town of Raritan immediately planned to have a homecoming parade in his honor. The parade organizer was Judge George Allgair. He was both a judge in the Somerville court system and the town's attorney, a position he held for over 25 years. He was quoted in *The Raritan Valley News* in the July 1st, 1943 issue, saying "It will be the greatest day in the history of Raritan". The parade was scheduled for Sunday, September 19th, 1943. The organizers called it "John Basilone Day".

Anticipating the public would turn out in vast numbers, the organizers realized that the town of Raritan would not be big enough, so they planned to start the parade in Somerville and end it in Raritan.

Once in Raritan, the parade would continue west down Somerset Street and turn left onto Nevius Street and advance over the Nevius Street Bridge to end in a large field where a rally would be held. The field was owned by tobacco heiress Doris Duke, who gladly loaned her property for the rally.

After much planning and anticipation, *John Basilone Day* arrived. At 8 AM, John Basilone was picked up by members of the parade committee at Marine Headquarters in New York City. He was driven to meet with the Bridgewater/Raritan Township Committee. Waiting until the day of the parade to bring John into town, as opposed to days before, added to the excitement.

At 10 AM, John Basilone attended a mass at St. Ann's Church in Raritan. He asked that mass be said in honor of his buddies still in Guadalcanal. Mass was said by Father Amedeo Russo, who said in his sermon "Sergeant Basilone's life will be a guide to American Youth. God had spared him for some important work."

At 11:30 AM there was a lunch in Basilone's honor headed by the reception committee at *The Raritan Valley Farms Inn* — a popular restaurant that was located on the Somerville Circle where the *Super 8 Motel* is today.

Then at 1 PM, the parade started. Total attendance was estimated at 30,000. The number of groups marching was large as well. Some of the groups marching included *The American Legion*, *Veterans of Foreign Wars* (VFW), state and local police, service men on leave, French Navy Soldiers, Coast Guard, Drum and Bugle Corps, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Red Cross Units, Air Raid Wardens, *The Italian-American Society*, Raritan First Aid Squad, soldiers from Camp Kilmer, and various marching bands.

One parade marcher was another *Congressional Medal of Honor* winner, John Reilly, who had won his honors in *The Spanish-American War* way back in 1898.

John Basilone rode in an open car with his parents, Sal and Dora — who beamed with pride throughout the day. Also in his car was Private Stephen Helstowski of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Stephen had fought with John at Guadalcanal and had been injured in the battle.

John sat on top of the back seat (between his parents) acknowledging cheers from the crowd. His car moved slowly, allowing John to shake hands with various people, including a group of veterans from *World War I*.

The atmosphere along the parade route was impressive. Signs were hung saying "Welcome Home Sergeant J. Basilone". There were flags everywhere, and bunting (half circular red, white, and blue banners.) John Basilone's picture appeared in many storefronts. Raritan resident and business owner Charley Glaser described the parade as "electrifying" — and said that "Basilone Day" was truly a once-in-a-lifetime event. All those in attendance recalled how the town was amazed that such a big event came to Raritan.

There were many politicians, numerous celebrities, and the national press. Even the young children, such as six-year-old Peter Vitelli knew that this day was special. Peter remembers fondly how much fun and how crowded the parade was as he sat on the curb in front of *St. Joe's Church*. A 13-year-old Anthony Hudak was in attendance. He said "it was a parade of a lifetime, it was as if the world came to Raritan." Others described it as "a magical day" where everyone was so happy. Even the weather turned out perfect for *John Basilone Day*.

It was a very emotional parade, as the war had consumed people's lives in many ways, through missed loved ones who were overseas, the rationing of goods, the constant news reports, and the ever mounting number of casualties of the local men who were fighting the war.

As planned, the parade ended in a field at Doris Duke's estate. At 3 PM, the festivities started. Speeches were given. Songs were sung. A blimp, supplied by the Navy, flew overhead. Bonds were sold. The master of ceremonies was Harry Hershfield, a popular New York Columnist, who was also host of a radio show called *Can You Top This*. The refreshments stand was staffed by members of the Somerville/Raritan Chapter of *The American Red Cross*. There was a platform with a microphone and a powerful sound system. Behind the platform was the grandstand where 250 important people from the state, the military, and the entertainment world sat. John's parents were seated in the front of the grandstand. The program started with the playing of *The National Anthem*, sung by a local rising singing star from Raritan, Catherine Mastice. Then Father Russo of St. Ann's said the invocation.

Next, a \$5000 war bond was presented to John Basilone by parade organizer George Allgair. John Basilone, while wearing his Medal of Honor, addressed the crowd:

*"I want to thank you Judge Allgair and these very good home folks of Raritan for this wonderful gift. For all my buddies overseas on the front lines — that they really appreciate everything you wonderful people are doing by backing the attack and buying these war bonds. Today is like a dream to me. Thank you all for everything"*

# Basilone's Welcome Home Parade Sept. 19th 1943



**John Basilone's Welcome Home Parade was featured in Life Magazine. There was also a newsreel made by *The Fox Movietone News*.**

**The photo on the left was taken on Somerset Street in Raritan. You can see the building that is now The Raritan Library on the right.**

**30,000 people attended the parade & rally.**

**After the parade, the crowd went over the Nevius Street Bridge to Doris Duke's Property for a rally.**

**Celebrities, politicians, and Basilone himself were among the speakers.**



from the bottom of my heart.”

John made sure to introduce Private Stephen Helstowski, who John said prayed in the same foxhole with him. One Speaker was former U.S. Senator Joseph S. Frelinghuysen Sr.— whose son was at that time in an enemy POW camp. Frelinghuysen said,

“Today, on the far-flung battlefronts of the world, some 600 brave lads from Raritan have answered the drum-beat of war; and you John are living witness that they fight valiantly and not in vain. Sergeant Basilone ... may I express personally to you the feeling of respect and admiration I have for the fine honor you displayed when, in recounting your experiences you said so modestly ‘I think only a part of this medal belongs to me; pieces of it belong to the boys who fought by my side.’”

While Frelinghuysen was speaking, John Basilone’s 5-year-old niece, Janice, who was his brother Angelo’s daughter, snuck up on the platform and sat with John. The crowd roared in response. Janice remained with John for most of the program. This was the image that the local press was looking for to highlight their story. A picture of John and his niece Janice appeared on the front page of *The Somerset Messenger Gazette*.

Another speaker was ex-New York City Mayor James J. Walker. He praised Raritan and its Italian heritage. Those present said that he was the most dynamic, inspiring speaker of the day. Highlights from his talk were:

“The Italian-American and the Italian Soldier are as valiant as exist when they’ve got something to fight for. Sergeant Basilone is an inspiration, not only to other Italian-Americans, but to all Americans.”

For entertainment, there was a singing quartet from the Coast Guard, who came wearing their uniforms and sailor hats. *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* said they “stole the show”. Interviews with those who personally attended the rally all remember how good the singers were. They received a terrific round of applause after each song. They were even called back for an unplanned encore.

Two Hollywood stars, Louise Allbritton and Virginia O’Brien, were present at the parade and rally. Louise Allbritton surprised and delighted everyone when she kissed John Basilone on stage. The crowd let out a tremendous roar. She then repeated the kiss a second time, in order to give the cameramen a chance to get their pictures. John’s sister Mary, who was close by, later wrote how John turned bright red upon his kiss with the beautiful movie star.

Three stars of New York Night Clubs were on hand — Maurice Rocco, Bob Morris, and Danny Thomas — who was at the beginning of his career. Thomas would later have his own T.V. show, *The Danny Thomas Show*.

Catherine Mastice, who had earlier sung *The National Anthem*, returned to the microphone to sing a new song especially written for the event. It was called *Manila John*.

Toward the end of the event, Master of Ceremonies Harry Herchfield talked John’s dad Salvatore into saying something to the crowd in Italian. Many understood his message, as Raritan was then a second generation Italian town, where the older people often spoke Italian. The two-hour program closed with *God Bless America*.

The parade was covered by all the local papers and *The New York Times*. *Life Magazine* ran a four-page story on *Basilone Day*. Even the *Fox Movietone News* made a newsreel that was shown at movie theatres throughout the country. This newsreel footage, which is just one minute and ten seconds long, is a true delight. The next week, the newspaper ads for both local theatres, *The Raritan Playhouse* and *The Cort Theatre* in Somerville, promoted the newsreel footage of Basilone Day. The local people flocked to the theatres to see this short footage, and oh yes, to see the regular movie as well. The first scene of the newsreel shows John riding in a car on Main Street in Somerville. The camera’s position was high above and the video shows the large enthusiastic crowds on both sides of the street. The whole spirit of the event is captured in this shot. Another scene shows John kissing his Mom. The real gem is at the end of the newsreel, where John Basilone speaks to the crowd.

John Basilone Day was an overwhelming success. No person in attendance had anything negative to say. Newspapers raved about how wonderful everything went. On his big day, John Basilone did not disappoint anyone who came to see him. He acknowledged the crowd throughout the day and spoke briefly at the bond rally. However, personally he said that he was overwhelmed by it all, and on the speakers stand at the rally he wished he would have said more, but the words just would not come out. Some friends said that he was not himself on the day of the parade. John was able to read the parade program beforehand. This gave him a sense of the immense size of the event. So he tried to prepare himself for the day, realizing that it would be the biggest day of his life. But it was overwhelming, as everyone wanted to shake his hand or touch the medal. Some security people were necessary during parts of day to keep the well-meaning crowd back.

## Photos from *John Basilone Day* Sept. 19th, 1943



There was a mass at St. Ann's Church in the morning.



A joyous celebration



Movie stars Louise Allbritton & Virginia O'Brien were on hand.



The hero shakes hands with the crowd



During the speeches, his niece Janice climbed up on his lap. The crowd roared.

### Somerset Messenger Gazette

#### Editorial Sept 1943 — An Eventful Occasion

The people of Raritan are to be congratulated on the splendid program which they sponsored to honor their fellow townsman hero John Basilone. It was truly worthy of the feat turned in by this skillful and brave Marine at Guadalcanal. Sergeant Basilone is worthy of this honor. During times such as the present, when our national security is threatened by foreign powers, we are compelled to rely upon force to protect everything we have developed here in America. All the philosophy, the science, the political institution and so on would be utterly worthless if we could not muster the men trained and courageous to defeat our enemies. Sergeant Basilone dramatizes for us all the sacrifice and bravery which is now being expended by our men to bring the war to a close as swiftly as our resources and fighting spirit will permit.

# Rowland Koskamp

Rowland Koskamp, Reverend of the Third Reformed Church (TRC) in Raritan, has quite an interesting and inspiring story, but until recently he had been forgotten. He volunteered to serve as an Army Chaplain overseas with the troops. In that assignment, he earned the Bronze Star, as his unit fought their way across Europe. He was taken POW, was liberated, then became a POW again, and tragically, was later killed in the war. While his name appears on a memorial plaque in front of the Raritan Municipal Building there has been little or no mention of him in any local history publications. His name is even spelled wrong on the memorial plaque. (Koskomp instead of Koskamp.) However, during World War II, he was well-known, as his ongoing travels appeared numerous times on the front pages of the local papers.

Rowland Koskamp, a native of Wisconsin, graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1940. His first assignment, in September of 1940, was to go to Raritan to replace the retiring pastor of The Third Reformed Church. He brought with him his new wife, Florence. In Raritan, they would live at 62 East Somerset Street, which then served as the rectory for the church. (Today a dentist office occupies that building.) In 1942, Florence gave birth to a baby girl, Karen Jane.

He served as Pastor of the TRC until April 1943, when with World War II raging, he decided he should be serving with the soldiers overseas on the front lines. He requested a leave of absence from the church to join the army as a chaplain. With his request was granted, he was shipped overseas to England and assigned to the 28th Infantry division. This unit would see plenty of combat. First, they landed at Normandy in July of 1944, one month after the massive U.S. landing that is known today as D-Day. They took up the struggle to move across France against stubborn resistance from the Germans. The terrain of France was dominated by thick bushes which covered the roadside. These bushes known as “hedgerows” gave cover to the defenders. This made each yard taken a difficult task. On their way toward Germany they would liberate many French towns. On August 29th, 1944, they would parade through a liberated Paris to cheering crowds. However, their celebration would be short-lived, as the unit soon packed up and fought their way on further toward Germany. They arrived in Luxemburg in November of 1944.

During the journey across Europe, Rowland would earn a promotion to Captain. Then in October of 1944, he was awarded The Bronze Star for his excellent service toward the men in his unit. A summary of the citation read “For meritorious service in connection with operations against the enemy from July 29 to October 3rd in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany.” The 28th Infantry needed his services as they had many casualties.

Part of a letter he had written home was printed on the front page of the local paper. It reflects his gentle nature, his dedication, and his ability to find humor in the insanity of war. It stated:

*“Our division is finally off the secret list so it can now be told that we’ve been in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. We’ve hit the Siegfried Line and for two weeks I lived in one of the pillboxes on the line. What structures they are. Kind of cramped though for a two-week stay. Since that time I’ve established a rest camp for men of the battalion. I had a lot of fun with that and plenty of opportunity to serve the men in it. It is located in a schoolhouse. We served hot meals, gave them sleeping accommodations, movies, and opportunity to write letters. And above all, opportunity to attend services which was deeply appreciated by the majority of them.”*

It is often said that there are no atheists in the foxholes. In another letter, Reverend Koskamp wrote *“I believe returning servicemen are going to be willing to give the church a hearing. Not 100 per cent of course, but in larger numbers than when they left home.”*

While in Luxemburg, they stayed in the schoolhouse that had been converted to a rest camp/aid station. One of the other soldiers staying in the house with him happened to also be from Raritan — Joe Sansone from Gaston Avenue. On the morning of December 17th, 1944, the 28th Infantry, like all of the U.S. Forces, were caught off-guard by a surprise German offensive. Koskamp and others were woken by the sounds of nearing artillery. The far off artillery fire gradually came closer and it started to shake the entire house. They did their part in this battle by going out and rounding up the wounded men and bringing them to the basement of the schoolhouse. This building was a good choice for an aid station as the cellar was reinforced with steel and concrete.

An assistant to Rowland Koskamp, Carl Montgomery, who would survive the war, told about the battle in the 2005 book *Battle in the Ardennes* by renown author John McManus. The raging battle on the edge of this small village had not initially been a cause for an alarm. The Germans had supposedly been weakened to the point that the war would be ending very soon. Also, the 28th Infantry had been taking on the Germans for months, winning every battle. Carl Montgomery said that “They always had stopped them in their tracks before, and I had no reason to think they wouldn’t this time too.”

However, as the hours went by, this battle was turning out to be very different. Later in the afternoon, Carl Montgomery saw how the Germans were closing in and he tried to convince Reverend Koskamp to leave. However, the Reverend would not hear of it. They were caring for an ever-growing number of wounded men in the basement, giving them water, cigarettes (often given for comfort to the wounded in those days), and doing whatever they could for them. Carl Montgomery had been Koskamp’s assistant throughout the war, thus he could not bring himself to leave him. Several of the soldiers had retreated to fight another day, but Koskamp, Montgomery, and Raritan’s Joe

# Rowland Koskamp - Heroic Reverend of *The Third Reformed Church in Raritan* Was Killed While Serving Overseas

## **Rev. R. Koskamp To Take Post as Army Chaplain**

(SMG March 1943)

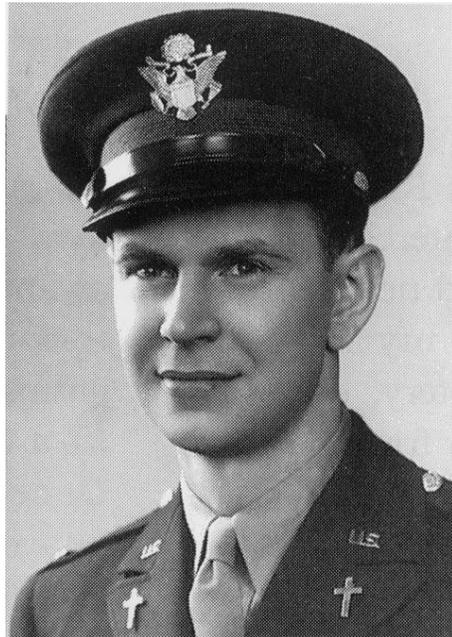
### **Minister of Raritan Third Reformed Gets Leave for Duration**

RARITAN – The Third Reformed Church here on Friday granted a leave of absence to the Rev. Rowland Koskamp, Pastor, who has been accepted for service as a U.S. Army Chaplain. He will first take an indoctrination course at Harvard University.

The Rev. Mr. Koskamp was ordained and installed as pastor here on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1940, succeeding the Rev. Edgar I. McCully who retired after serving the church for sixteen years. Koskamp was born in Oostburg, Wis., and graduated from Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, both located in Holland, Michigan.

The minister plans to leave here after the first Sunday in April. Mrs. Koskamp and their daughter, Karen Jane, born in October, 1942, will go to Holland, Mich., where they will remain for the period of the war.

The Third Reformed Church has called to replace him Eugene Osterhaven of Michigan. The Classis of Raritan will be asked to arrange for his ordination and installation here.



With his wife Florence



Rowland and daughter Karen Jane



On the steps of  
The Third Reformed Church

## Rowland Koskamp continued

Sansone had chosen to stay with the wounded.

With the Germans closing in, Reverend Koskamp and his unit had some reassurance when a US tank positioned itself right in front of the schoolhouse-aid station. However, the U.S. tank quickly took a direct hit from a powerful shell. The tank blew-up — the explosion ripped through one of the walls of the schoolhouse. Then a German tank started to fire directly into the building — pumping round after round into the schoolhouse until it was completely destroyed. They managed to avoid injury in the basement. When the barrage stopped, there was nothing left to do but hope to be able to surrender. Their story of how they surrendered was recounted by Raritan's Joe Sansone, he said:

“Captain Koskamp went outside to talk to the German officer. He found the German could not speak English so he spoke to the officer in German or Dutch – I believe it was German, Captain Koskamp could make himself understood and could understand the officer.” The Reverend then had a bold request of the Germans—he asked that they let them go. He explained that while the other troops had withdrawn, he and the remaining troops had stayed behind to care for the wounded. And some of these wounded were Germans who were treated very well. However, the Germans stated that Koskamp and the others had observed the German troop strength so his request could not be granted.

But they did manage to surrender, which is never a guarantee in the brutality of war. The poor treatment they would receive as prisoners immediately became apparent, as the Germans refused their request for them to grab their overcoats. During this battle, which is today known as *The Battle of the Bulge*, the Germans captured thousands of U.S. soldiers. Koskamp, Sansone, and Montgomery were marched with 3000 others to a railroad station. Sixty men were put in each box car. Joe Sansone further went on to tell about their first days as prisoners.

*“We had no food all day the first day that we were captured. The next day we had bread and water. We had nothing on the third day. On Christmas we received English Red Cross boxes; five of us shared a box.”*

An eight day train ride would take them to their POW camp. On their train ride to the prison at one point they were parked at a train stop when some U.S. planes circled around, firing at the train. The German guards ran off until the attack was over — leaving the prisoners locked in the box cars. Some of the prisoners were killed by this friendly fire. The Americans were obviously not aware that their own men were on this train. Reverend Koskamp would survive this round of friendly fire from the skies.

When they arrived at the POW complex, the officers were separated from the enlisted men. Thus Koskamp, who was an officer, would be separated from and Sansone and Montgomery. At the officer's POW camp, which was known as Hammelburg 13B, Rowland Koskamp took on the purpose of keeping morale up among the men. He did an excellent job. One survivor recalled “He was every man's preacher. ... He calmed the griper, supported the downer, let it be known that our present circumstance was only a temporary setback, and that there is a caring God who is concerned and offers eternity to those who call upon him.” Keeping busy in the camp is essential, yet often difficult as men have little strength for physical activity. One of the things that Rowland Koskamp did was to set up a Toastmasters Club where soldiers would learn to speak to a group. Each speaker would share a story and those in attendance would evaluate the speaker on grammar and presentation style. These small activities would be vital to keeping morale high in the camp. Camp conditions were not good. The small amount of food they received was terrible. The average man would lose 30-40 pounds.

Another important function that Reverend Koskamp did inside the POW camp was to provide his fellow prisoners updated news reports on the war. As a chaplain, he was often allowed to travel to different sections of the POW camp. In one section, some Serbian officers had managed to hide a radio. When Koskamp visited their section, they would update him on the news that they had received from the BBC in London. He would then pass this information along to the men in his section of the camp.

On March 27th, 1945, after being a prisoner for over three months, they were pleasantly surprised when a group of U.S. tanks broke through the fence of the POW camp. The German guards fled. A few days before the U.S. army had broken through the German defenses at the Rhine River. Soon after that a group of 200 men, with several tanks and vehicles were sent dashing forward 60 miles to liberate the POW camp. The former prisoners quickly looted the German supply warehouse. They also killed and cooked several of the animals that were there for food. They ate to gain some strength and packed what supplies might be of aid to get back to the U.S. Forces. Getting back to safety would still be a challenge. They were 60 miles from the bulk of the U.S. Army and the rescuing group had over-run their supply line. The escaped prisoners and their liberators, along with the vehicles and tanks, headed back to meet up with the U.S. Army. Still on enemy territory, with the war ravishing around them, they traveled that night. They had only traveled 10 miles when many tanks and vehicles started running out of gas. In the confusion of war they were not able to meet up with a fuel supply truck. The men held a conference to decide what to do. It was 50 miles to the Rhine River, where the U.S. troops were. But it was just 10 miles back to the POW camp. They figured if they went back to the camp, U.S. forces would probably liberate them in a few days. Most men decided to travel back to the POW camp. The simple shelter of the barracks could be lifesaving under the winter conditions. A prisoner returning to his POW camp after a brief futile escape was not all that rare. The Germans usually did not execute the returning prisoner. Others decided to attempt the 50-mile journey to the Rhine

# In the POW Camp, Reverend Koskamp kept up the spirits of the prisoners.

## Capt. Koskamp War Prisoner

Capt. Rowland A. Koskamp, a chaplain of the 28th Division, missing since Dec. 20, is safe in a prisoner of war camp in Germany. This news came yesterday morning from the War Department to his wife, now living at Holland, Mich.

Chaplain Koskamp was pastor of the Third Reformed Church until he went into the service in Apr., 1943. He was with 110th Regiment and was one of the three local men reported missing on the same day. The other two, Pvt. Joseph Sansone, 15 Gaston Ave. and Pvt. Joseph F. Perone, Route 31, have also been found in prison camps. Apparently the three were captured in the "Belgian Bulge" during the big German push last December.

The Chaplain, who holds the Bronze Star for bravery, landed in France with the first invasion troops and was with the 28th Division in all the heavy fighting from St. Lo to Germany.

The Rev. M. Eugene Osterhaven, who holds his pulpit for the duration, said yesterday that the War Department had advised Mrs. Koskamp that further information would be forthcoming soon. Mrs. Koskamp and her two-year-old son are staying with her parents.

One survivor in the POW camp recalled:  
*"He was every man's preacher. ... He calmed the griper, supported the downer, let it be known that our present circumstance was only a temporary setback, and that there is a caring God who is concerned and offers eternity to those who call upon him."*

Another officer who was in the POW camp with him wrote:  
*"None of us who were with him at the Hammelberg POW camp will ever forget him."*

One from his commanding officer stated:  
*"It will comfort you to know that he did a magnificent job as Chaplain of his unit. His praises have been highly sung by his men who love him and honor him."*

## Raritan's Joe Sansone of 15 Gaston Avenue was taken Prisoner with Koskamp.

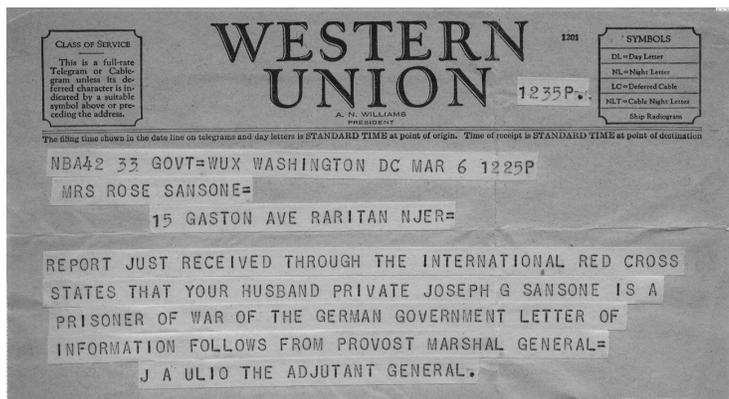


## RARITAN SOLDIER FREED IN EUROPE

RARITAN, May 7.—Pfc. Joseph G. Sansone of the 110th Infantry, 28th Division, who was captured by the Germans on December 20, 1944, was liberated on April 2 by Allied forces, according to information received by his wife, Mrs. Rose T. Sansone of 15 Gaston avenue, from the War Department.

Since then, the soldier has written to his wife from a rest camp in France and told her that he is being treated well and receiving good food. He also wrote that he cannot tell her yet what he has been through.

Chaplain Rowland A. Koskamp, pastor of the Third Reformed Church, who was captured with Pvt. Sansone, has also been liberated, according to word received by his wife, temporarily living in Holland, Mich. Another local man taken prisoner with Pvt. Sansone was Pvt. Joseph F. Perone, brother of Anthony Perone of Highway 31, South Somerville.



The above article that tells of Joe Sansone's liberation falsely says that Koskamp had escaped.

## Rowland Koskamp continued

River. Some stayed at their location with the now stalled vehicles. Reverend Koskamp would return to the POW camp. When they returned to the camp their hope to be liberated in a few days was shattered as the Germans had regrouped, smartened up and quickly took the U.S. prisoners on a 100 mile march toward a different POW camp in Nuremberg.

This was a dangerous time to be outside and exposed in Germany. The war was almost over. The U.S. Air Force had full control of the skies and was bombing German cities day and night. On April 5th, Rowland Koskamp and the other prisoners were still on the forced march, yet coming near their destination of the POW camp in Nuremberg. His group saw numerous planes dropping bombs on the city of Nuremberg. At first, they felt somewhat safe as they were a few miles from the center of the city where the bombs were falling. They were also in the woods. But soon they marched forward, always with guns pointed at them, and saw through the trees and across an open field that they were just a quarter of a mile from a railroad station. Unfortunately, this railroad station was the target of the next load of bombs. (The U.S. had no intelligence reports to inform them that their own men were being marched to a new POW camp.) As the bombs rained down through the trees, the men hit the dirt, desperately trying for cover. However, there were many powerful bombs dropped from hundreds of planes by a U. S. Air Force that was determined to finish off the Germans. Around 30 Americans were killed in this bombing. Rowland Koskamp, Reverend of The Third Reformed Church in Raritan, was one of them.

Back on the homefront in Raritan, Reverend Koskamp's ongoing travels had been tracked in the local papers. From his volunteering to go overseas, his promotion to Captain, to his being awarded the Bronze Star were all printed and read by the residents of Raritan. On December 20th, 1944, it was reported in the local Raritan paper that he was missing in action. In March 1945, hope was given when it was reported that he was a POW. In April 1945, his wife had received inaccurate news from a war department telegram that said he had been freed from the POW camp. Apparently some men liberated with him that had made it to freedom did not realize that Reverend Koskamp had gone back to the POW camp with many others. Thus, with the word from his wife, the local papers mistakenly reported that he was free. The Raritan community was looking forward to the return of their Pastor who had served so well in the war. But then Rowland Koskamp's wife Florence received another telegram toward the end of May, this one sadly accurate, that said her husband had been killed in action. She notified the new Pastor of the Third Reformed Church in Raritan on a Saturday night. The new Pastor chose to announce the tragic news of Reverend Koskamp's death at mass the next Sunday morning, May 27th, 1945. Those in attendance were shocked. They had last heard that Reverend Koskamp had been freed. And the war in Europe had ended over two weeks ago, as Germany had surrendered on May 8th. No more casualties were expected from the war in Europe, but news traveled slowly in the 1940s.

The Third Reformed Church held a memorial service to honor their fallen Reverend on Sunday, June 10th, 1945. The other Raritan churches made sure that no other activities were scheduled that evening so that there would be no conflicts for those that wanted to attend. Reverend Koskamp's wife Florence and his daughter Karen Jane, now 2 years old, came from Michigan, where they had been staying since Rowland had gone overseas. The church was overflowing with worshippers. At the service, excerpts from some letters written by the men that served with Reverend Koskamp were read. One from his commanding officer stated *"It will comfort you to know that he did a magnificent job as Chaplain of his unit. His praises have been highly sung by his men who love him and honor him."* Another officer who was in the POW camp with him wrote *"None of us who were with him at the Hammelberg POW camp will ever forget him."* The letter went on to tell of the inspiring talks given by the minister and lauded his personal bravery as a soldier and prisoner.

Rowland Koskamp died serving his country. He could have stayed on the homefront as Pastor of The Third Reform Church in Raritan, but he choose to go overseas where he felt he could do the most good. He never regretted his decision. In one of his last letters that he wrote home, he said "My work is proving most gratifying. I have never regretted my decision to enter it. I do, however, desperately long for the day when there will be no more opportunities for Army Chaplains and I can continue my work in a civilian parish."

**Rowland Koskamp had an excellent war record.  
He was promoted to Captain and was  
Awarded *The Bronze Star*.**

**Chaplain Koskamp  
Made a Captain**  
RARITAN—Chaplain Rowland Koskamp on leave from the Third Reformed Church has been promoted to the rank of Captain in the Army Chaplain Corps. He is now overseas in the European theatre.

**Captain Koskamp  
Chaplain in Army,  
Wins Bronze Star**  
Raritan Church Pastor Decorated in Germany; Has Been With Troops Advancing Since D-Day

Highlights from local newspapers



Carl Montgomery was Koskamp's assistant during the war. He was taken prisoner at the same time.



Carl Montgomery rode in the 2012 Basilone Parade.

Carl Montgomery said that no man was calmer when the bullets were flying than Reverend Rowland Koskamp. He was as "cool as cucumber" in these life-and-death situations.

# Local War Facilities

## Belle Mead Depot

The Belle Mead Depot had the largest stock of military goods of any warehouse site in the history of the world. It was just two miles southwest of Amwell Road and Route 206. While the U.S. had 11 of these depots throughout the country, Belle Mead was the largest. The depot had 300 laborers and 500 soldiers working in the complex. At the start of the war, there was no depot, the land was just 1000 acres of farmland. By August of 1942, the complex opened with 14 large warehouses consisting of 2.5 million square-feet of storage space. At any one time, the value of the goods stored there was over a billion dollars. There were extensive railroad tracks throughout the complex. These tracks connected with two main nearby rail lines.

The goods that were temporarily stored there would be shipped overseas to the U.S. and Allied troops overseas. There were trucks, jeeps, landing craft, tanks, and earth-moving equipment. All sizes of guns ranging from rifles to massive anti-aircraft guns were stored. All types of equipment necessary to win a war were there. Mobile water purification units, target dummies, concrete mixers, camouflage netting, telegraph equipment, radio transmitters and steel rail for railroad tracks. To feed the troops, one warehouse -- that could be called the largest grocery store in the world -- held the emergency field rations. Hundreds of railroad cars worth of these rations would be shipped each month to the troops overseas.

No ammunition was stored at the Belle Mead Depot. The standard policy was to store all ammunition at separate locations. The security was tight at the depot with guards both human and canine. It was not until June of 1944 that the military authorities even let reporters in for a tour of the facility. The local newspapers then ran stories about the details of the facility, but none showed any photographs. It was obviously a security regulation was that no photos could be taken. That rule must have been strictly enforced, as no photos of the complex from the days of World War II could be found by this author.

Toward the end of the war, some prisoners would be held here. First in 1944, some Italian prisoners were brought here to work. As stated elsewhere in this book, Italy was only initially a reluctant enemy and offered to switch sides midway through the war. The prisoners volunteered to come here and were paid. The authorities at the depot knew that prisoners would cause some concern from the local community. They expected calls and they did receive many, but not of the type they thought. Many local Italian residents were inquiring about relatives, and how could they meet with them. Later, in 1945, some real enemy prisoners — Germans - would be held inside the depot.

The depot would remain open for decades after the war. The lax environmental standards of yesteryear caused much contamination to the site. Today it is in the process of being cleaned up so that it can be converted into a park.

## Calco Pharmaceuticals

Calco Pharmaceuticals was a 60-acre manufacturing complex in Bridgewater on the border of Bound Brook that was made up of dozens of buildings. It was just behind where the Somerset Patriots baseball stadium is today. That land is now almost completely empty.

During World War II, Calco, with its 4000 employees, made tremendous contributions to the war effort. Hundreds of Raritan residents, men and women, would work there.

Calco was the principal producer in the U.S. of sulfa-drugs. Before sulfa was used, infection on the battlefield was a common cause of death during wartime. Sulfa was the first and only effective antibiotic available in the years before penicillin was widely available, thus sulfa drugs were produced in mass throughout the early years of World War II. Sulfa was known as the wonder drug, as it was credited with saving the lives of tens of thousands of patients. American soldiers were issued a first-aid kit containing sulfa pills and sulfa-powder, which they were told to sprinkle on any open wound.

Another product produced by Calco was the dyes that were used to help camouflage the uniforms of our soldiers, sailors, and marines. The production of dyes encompassed a great deal of the complex. Many of the positions at the plant were related to producing dyes.

While Calco was not a munitions plant that created weapons, they did produce chemicals that were used in making gunpowder for shells, bullets, torpedoes, bombs, and other explosives. Calco was one of the most important producers of these chemicals in the U.S.

Calco also produced chemicals that were important in making synthetic rubber. Due to Japan taking over the countries that had 90% of the natural supply of rubber, the production of synthetic rubber was vital. Calco produced a chemical that enabled synthetic rubber to dry four times faster.

To aid in locating pilots who were stranded in the ocean after being shot down, Calco produced a fluorescent chemical that was used in life jackets. To further aid these downed pilots, they made shark repellent.

Additives which increased the octane rating of aviation gasoline were produced at Calco. So were chemicals which lengthened the life of the lubricating oil that was used in tanks, planes, and other vehicles.

For their part, the U.S. Government awarded Calco The Army-Navy "E" Award. This was a prestigious award that was given by the U.S. government to just 4% of the manufacturers. It was for excellence in both quality and quantity.

# Hundreds of Raritan people would work at these war production plants.

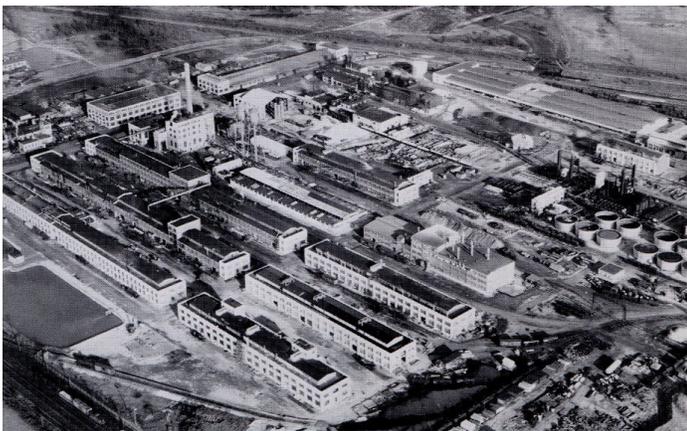


**Johns Manville**  
Manville  
made insulation for planes and boats. Today Wal-Mart and the Manville Movie Theatre are there.



## Calco Pharmaceuticals

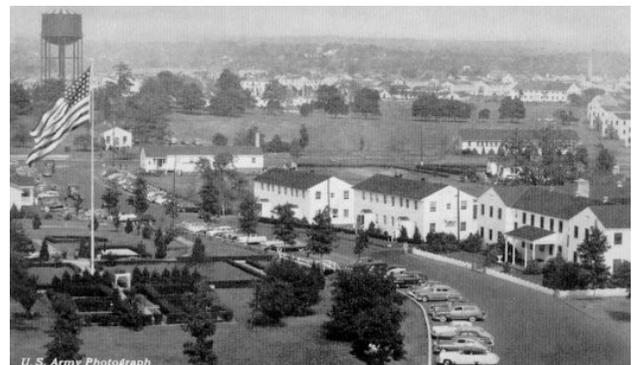
Bridgewater  
made sulfa drugs which prevented the infections of battlefield wounds. They also made dye for the military uniforms, and chemicals to aid in the production of synthetic rubber. Today the Somerset Patriots Baseball Stadium sits on what was the Calco parking lot.



# Two other local places supported the war.



**The Belle Mead Depot**  
Belle Mead  
It was the largest storage facility of military equipment in the world. Today the site is being cleaned up and converted into a park.



**Camp Kilmer**  
Piscataway  
The camp had thousands of troops stationed there. Today Livingston Campus of Rutgers occupies the land.

# Christmas in Raritan during World War II

Christmas has always been a major holiday in the United States, but during World War II (1941-45) it took on special meaning, as many families had a “loved one” serving in the military who could not be home for Christmas. During the war years, “Peace on Earth” was not just a nice phrase found on Christmas cards, but the number one wish of all peace-loving people throughout the world. The Christmas season gave hope that while this year many were away, maybe next year the war would be over and missing family members would return home.

## Homefront

The local stores for Christmas shopping around Raritan in 1941-1945 were much different than today. The Bridgewater Mall was just vacant land and the Internet had not been imagined yet. Most Christmas shopping was done with the local Raritan merchants. Back then, Raritan had two clothing stores; *Granetz*, which was located at 1 East Somerset Street, and *Glaser's*, which was at the corner of Thompson Street and Second Street. *Rocky's*, a department store, was located on Somerset Street. All three stores were owned by Raritan residents in this era of mom-and-pop stores. Goods not available in Raritan could be found in Somerville in the bigger department stores such as *Sears*, *Grants*, and *Burke's*. For jewelry, Somerville had *Littman's Jewelry Store*. Yet the premiere store of the era was *Bamberger's*, which was located in Plainfield — a train ride away. Another town that was often visited for shopping was New Brunswick which had a number of popular stores. Buses headed toward New Brunswick every 20 minutes from downtown Raritan.

Wartime brought about a unique turnaround in consumer purchasing power and availability of goods. Before the war, America was still recovering from the Great Depression, when money and jobs were scarce. Shoppers were often limited to window-shopping, as they did not have any extra money to purchase anything not considered a necessity. When the war began, war production went into high gear. Thus there were more good-paying jobs—and with that, shoppers at last had additional discretionary income to purchase goods. Unfortunately, there was little to buy, as rationing and priorities in war production left few goods on the shelves. Metal toys had nearly disappeared — as did radios, bicycles, typewriters, and other standard goods that had previously been available before the war.

The wartime production priorities greatly restricted the presents that children could receive for Christmas. This needed to be told to the kids — and who better to tell them than St. Nick himself. Santa Claus at the local department stores had to lower expectations when talking to the children that came to sit on his lap. Santa would tell the kids not to expect too much because of the war. He made no promises. Sometimes Santa had to explain that a particular toy had too much steel in it — and that steel was needed for the war. If a child seemed disappointed in Santa's lack of promises, Santa would inform the child that some children living in the countries where the war was being fought will have no Christmas at all ... Ho Ho Ho.

To obtain the family Christmas tree during WWII, there was no need to drive out of town (most families did not even have a car) as Christmas trees were sold right on Somerset Street in Raritan. You paid your three dollars and carried your tree home. It was common for families to purchase their tree just a day or two before Christmas. Back then, the Christmas celebration was carried on for many days after December 25<sup>th</sup>. Christmas music could be heard on the radio into early January.

John Pacifico, who was a young teenager during World War II, recalls that the community spirit at Christmastime was much different than today. Most everyone walked to their destination, thus you interacted with neighbors and friends often, and so “The Spirit of the Christmas” was constantly shared together among the Raritan residents.

The greeting then in Raritan (as in the rest of the country) was “Merry Christmas” – the phrase “Happy Holidays” was not in the vocabulary of 1940s America.

## Overseas

As for the soldiers and sailors overseas at Christmas, military necessity and lack of accommodations forced them to have a minimal or close to non-existent holiday celebration. Raritan's John Hudak, who served in the Navy during World War II, today sums up his Christmas wartime experience by saying, “Christmas was just like any other day.”

At Christmastime many of the boys serving overseas would get the blues. But visual reminders of home could cheer them up — even if it was just for a moment. Raritan tavern owner Tony Orlando sent a photo of a Christmas tree that he had dedicated to the Raritan GIs to dozens of Raritan servicemen overseas. This photo indeed “hit home”, as many surviving letters written home during World War II talk about the photo of the tree.

Ironically, while the GIs overseas were not able to be with family then, their fighting of the war was insuring that they would be free to celebrate future Christmas holidays with their families.



**In 1944, Tony Orlando dedicated this Christmas Tree to “Our Fighting Boys”. He sent a picture of this tree to dozens of Raritan GIs.**



Thank you for the wonderful picture of the Christmas tree - it's a sight that is very familiar and in a place that I'd like to be right now.

*Mike Musz*

Well another Christmas came and is gone and the war isn't coming to an end. This is my third Christmas that I have spent away from home, and it looks very much like I'll be in the army for a fourth. I sure hope not.

*Stanley Waida*

It's a darn nice tree. I'd like to have been there. I'm sending it to my brother Jim. I guess he will then send it to my brother Joe.

*Frank Del Rocco*

"Thanks a million for the picture of your famous wall and Christmas Tree for the boys".

*Mike Troisi*



## Five Del Rocco Brothers Serve in the War

There was no better example of Raritan's patriotism than at 9 Doughty Street, where the Del Rocco family had 5 of their sons serving in the military. The parents, Frank and Catherine Del Rocco had both been born in Italy. Frank was from the Naples area and immigrated to Raritan in the early 1900s where he met a local girl, Catherine Pastore, who had also been born in Italy. They would marry in 1907. The next year they would celebrate the birth of their son, Ralph, who was the first of their 10 children. Soon after, the other children were born — Anthony, James, Betty, Frank Jr., Steve, Joe, Michael, Anna, and finally, in 1926, Mary.

Initially, the family lived in an apartment at 27 Anderson Street in Raritan. By the early 1920's, the family had outgrown the apartment and they moved to a house located at 9 Doughty Street. The home fulfilled the family needs as it had 5 bedrooms, but as homes were designed back then, it had only one bathroom.

These were simple times. Frank Sr. who grew up in an era with little technology, never wanted a car. He walked everywhere by choice. He was employed just a few blocks away at The Raritan Woolen Mills. Wife Catherine did not work — as she had 10 children to care for, a full time job as we all know. The family's first car would not come until Frank Jr. and Anthony were old enough to drive and they purchased a car together. In those days, the necessities of life were all within walking distance. Frank always walked to work, while Catherine shopped locally for groceries and the department stores carried a wide variety of goods for the family needs. Their neighbor, John Pacifico, who lived just two houses away at 13 Doughty Street, recalled life back in Raritan the 1930s and 1940s. "The whole street was like one big family. It was common for one family to spend time in the other's home or yard. It was an era where we never locked our doors. That's how it was back then. As for the Del Roccas, they were wonderful people to have as neighbors. "

The first Del Rocco son to join the military was Frank Jr., who enlisted in the Navy in December of 1939. His brother Steve enlisted in the Army a few months later, in March of 1940. The U.S. would enter the war after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. Joe Del Rocco enlisted in the Army soon after, in February of 1942. One month later, James would also enlist in the Army. The fifth brother, Michael, enlisted in the Navy in October of 1943. That made it 5 Del Rocco brothers fighting for the country. The town all knew the brothers and were very proud of them. The local paper sometimes called them "The Wandering Del Roccas".

Their sister Anna recalled life on the homefront during the war. With five brothers in harm's way, there was constant worry. Every family with a son overseas feared the telegram delivered by the Western Union delivery boy. The telegrams notified a family of their son's death and began with a phrase now etched in American History "REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON ..." Occasionally the delivery boy, usually on a bicycle from the Telegram office in Somerville, would come into Raritan. Anna recalled one day while she was out and around in Raritan, she saw the Western Union boy making his way into town. She decided that just in case he was headed to their home to delivery tragic news, that she should be home—so she immediately headed there. Fortunately, the Western Union delivery boy did not come to their home that day. In fact, he never came to the Del Rocco home, as all her brothers returned home safely after the war.

Always religious, the family found strength in the church during the war. Anna Del Rocco recalls how her mother attended Mass at St. Ann's every day. For spiritual support, inside St. Ann's church several families who had sons in the service had their last names displayed on small oval plaques that were placed on the beams going into the ceiling. They felt it couldn't hurt to have your name posted in the house of God to watch over them. These small plaques (around a dozen of them) remained visible in the church for decades after the war. However, during a renovation in the 1980s, the beams were painted and the plaques were covered up.

Anna's mother always made sure that Anna regularly wrote to her brothers. Even if there was not that much new information to put in the next letter, she still wrote to them — all of them. In an age before computers and where copiers were unknown, Anna hand wrote five similar letters to each of her brothers.

While serving their country, the Del Rocco brothers never got to see each other. But they did write. However, on one occasion, Navy men Michael and Frank Jr. almost did get to meet. This was at the island of Saipan in the Pacific. Their ships, unknown to them at the time, had been docked just 100 yards apart. Michael was aboard the *USS Mount McKinley* and Frank Jr. was then on a fleet tanker the *USS Manatee*. After Michael's ship departed for another port, Frank then learned that his brother's ship had been nearby. They would have to wait till the war's end to meet again. The 5 brothers all had different experiences in the war.

Steve Del Rocco, who was in the Army, was stationed in San Juan, Puerto Rico for two years. He then returned to the states to train soldiers at boot camps in Texas, Alabama, and Georgia.

Joseph Del Rocco, also in the Army, was stationed at Ft. Dix, New Jersey. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant before his unit moved to the Pacific Theater of Operations. He fought in the battles for New Guinea and the Philippines. Joe supervised 25 men in the operation of range-finding equipment, such as radar and data predicting instruments. He served in the 166<sup>th</sup> anti-aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion. Having shot down at least 36 Japanese Aircraft, the 166<sup>th</sup> was awarded the highest award given by the US for unit service - The Presidential Unit Citation — for their distinguished service in the Philippines.

Michael, in the Navy, served aboard the *USS Mount McKinley*, an escort and communications ship that operated

## Del Rocco Brothers of 9 Doughty Street



### 5 Brothers from one Raritan Family Served in the War.

When the war ended, the Del Rocco family hired an artist, whose name has been lost to history, to create a portrait of the five Del Rocco brothers together in their military uniforms. This portrait was proudly displayed in the years to come at 9 Doughty Street, in the Del Rocco living room. Today, the portrait is in the home of Steve Jr.

**Michael** (Top Left ) Navy - served aboard the *USS Mount McKinley*, an escort and communications ship that operated in the Pacific. The ship helped direct a landing at Peleliu in September of 1944. Later in October that year, the ship was engaged in the battle of Leyte Gulf. At the end of March, 1945, they directed landings at Okinawa.

**Frank** (Top Right ) Navy, would see extensive combat aboard the *USS Astoria* and engaged in several now famous sea battles in the Pacific against the Japanese. This included the Battle of The Coral Sea, the Battle of Midway, and the battle at Guadalcanal (Savo Island) where his ship was sunk.

**Joseph** (Bottom Left) (Army) He served in the 166<sup>th</sup> anti-aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion. He fought in the battles for New Guinea and the Philippines. He was a Staff Sergeant who supervised 25 men in the operation of range finding equipment such as radar and data-predicting instruments.

**Steve** (Bottom Center) (Army) Trained soldiers at boot camps in Texas, Alabama, and Georgia.

**James** (Bottom Right) (Army) He went overseas with the 77<sup>th</sup> Division and fought in battles at Hollandia and New Guinea. His unit would also engage in the battles of Leyte Gulf and Okinawa.

## The Five Del Rocco Brothers (continued)

in the Pacific. The ship was a floating command post with advanced communications equipment to coordinate large-scale amphibious landings. The ship helped direct a landing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at Peleliu in September of 1944. Later in October that year, the ship was engaged in the battle of Leyte Gulf. The ship came under attack from the air by the Japanese, but was not hit. At the end of March 1945, the *USS Mount McKinley* went to the southern coast of Okinawa to direct the landing of the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Research for this article has brought to light that this Division (the 77<sup>th</sup>) was Michael's brother James' Division. Details beyond that are not known.

James, in the Army, had first been stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina where he worked as an auto mechanic. He went overseas with the 77<sup>th</sup> Division and fought in the battle of Hollandia, New Guinea. His unit would also engage in the battles of Leyte Gulf and Okinawa.

Frank Del Rocco fought against the Japanese in the Pacific theater of operations with the US Navy. His ship, the *USS Astoria*, saw action in several now legendary naval battles. This includes The Battle of the Coral Sea, The Battle at Midway, and The Naval Battle at Guadalcanal. He just missed the attack at Pearl Harbor, as the *USS Astoria* was docked there two days before the attack on December 7th. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, the ship had been sent to re-supply the strategic outpost of Wake Island. Upon hearing of the attack, the *Astoria* was immediately ordered to return to Pearl Harbor to search for the enemy. After several days of patrol where no enemy contact was made, the *Astoria* returned to Pearl Harbor where the sailors saw the devastation done by the sneak attack that launched America into World War II.

**Battle of the Coral Sea**—A few months into the war on May 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> 1942, the U.S. Navy would engage the Japanese Navy for the first time in what historians call the Battle of the Coral Sea. This was the first sea battle fought by airplanes launched from aircraft carriers where neither side's ships sighted or fired directly upon each other. No surface ships engaged directly — the battle was fought entirely from the air. The Japanese were attempting to expand their empire in the South Pacific by invading New Guinea. Through intelligence, the U.S. learned of the Japanese plans. More importantly, the Japanese did not know that their plans were known by the Americans, who were setting a trap for the advancing Japanese fleet. The U.S. Navy formed a task force of ships that had survived the Pearl Harbor attack to block the Japanese advance. Frank's ship, the *USS Astoria*, was one of these ships in the task force. The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first U.S. battle after Pearl Harbor against the Japanese fleet. In this battle, numerically the Japanese came out on top as the U.S. lost several ships, including the aircraft carrier *Lexington*. In turn, the Japanese only had a few ships damaged. However, strategically, the U.S. could claim a victory, as the Japanese withdrew from their attempt to occupy New Guinea. This was the first time in the war that a Japanese invasion force had been turned back. During the battle, the *USS Astoria* put up intense anti-aircraft fire against the attacking Japanese planes, which were aiming at the U.S. aircraft carriers — *The Lexington* and *The Yorktown*. The *Astoria*'s gunners claimed to have shot down at least four enemy planes in the attack.

**The Battle at Midway** A month later, The *USS Astoria* took part in what has come to be known as *The Battle at Midway*. Again, U.S. intelligence had broken the Japanese Naval Code and learned of the Japanese plan to take Midway Island, a strategic outpost in the Pacific, manned by U.S. Marines and ground-based fighter planes.

The Navy again formed a task force that included the *USS Astoria* to rendezvous with the Japanese fleet and defend Midway Island. In the ensuing engagement, the *Astoria* used their anti-aircraft guns to protect the aircraft carrier *Yorktown*. The *Astoria* took damage as the Japanese aircraft bombs found their mark. Frank Del Rocco recalled in a newspaper interview (while home on leave during the war) – that it was a close call for him, as he was stationed below in the boiler room when several near misses rocked the ship. At one point in the battle, several enemy torpedo bombers converged on the damaged *Yorktown*. In a creative use of defense, the anti-aircraft guns on The *Astoria* and other ships shot their guns into the ocean to throw up curtains of water into the path of the attackers to obstruct their vision and bombing accuracy. Despite their best efforts, the *Yorktown* suffered more hits and the order came to abandon ship. In response, the *Astoria* launched several lifeboats to rescue a number of *Yorktown* survivors. The Battle of Midway was a decisive U.S. victory, as four Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk by airplanes from the U.S. aircraft carriers. As a result of the loss of so many aircraft carriers, the Japanese Navy was never able to attack the advancing U.S. forces again and could only try to defend their Pacific outposts from the relentless U.S. onslaught. Historically, the Battle at Midway was the turning point in the war in the Pacific. It was the Allies' first major victory against the Japanese.

### Naval Battle off Guadalcanal — The Battle at Savo Island

The next offensive battle in the Pacific was for control of the sea around the island of Guadalcanal, which was the first U.S. invasion of a Japanese held island in the war. Again, Frank Del Rocco and the *USS Astoria* would be part of another now legendary battle in the Pacific. Initially, the U.S. surprised the small Japanese garrison on the island and captured Guadalcanal and its vital airfield. The Japanese responded by bringing ships loaded with men and material to retake Guadalcanal. The U.S. also set out to bring men and supplies to the island. The *Astoria* accompanied the troop and supply transports to protect them from Japanese planes and ships as the men and material moved from sea to land to supply the hard pressed Marines. On the night of August 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>, a large Japanese task force came to challenge the U.S. fleet defending the island. They faced-off at a small nearby island off Guadalcanal named Savo Island. The ensu-

**The Del Rocco Family had 10 kids — 5 who served in WWII.**



**Mom and Dad**



**They lived at this home at 9 Doughty Street.**



**Top row** (all standing), left to right...Al Orecchio, Joseph Del Rocco, Boise Williams, Anthony Moretti, Ralph J. Del Rocco, Frank Del Rocco, Frank Del Rocco Sr., Michael Del Rocco, Steve Del Rocco, Anthony Del Rocco.

**next row** left to right (all seated except mom) ...Elizabeth Orecchio (Betty Del Rocco), Barbara Oranski (Orecchio), Lena Del Rocco ( Joe's wife), Mary Williams (Del Rocco), Ann Moretti (Del Rocco), Louise Del Rocco ( Orecchio) Catherine Del Rocco and baby.

**bottom row** (seated in front) left to right....Kathy Maiorano (Del Rocco), Ralph F. Del Rocco, Frank Del

## The Five Del Rocco Brothers (continued)

ing battle became known as The (First) Battle of Savo Island. It took place in the dark of night. The opposing ships fired intensely at each other, even though it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. (This was before the radar and sonar that we have today.) At one point in the battle, the *Astoria* stopped firing, as they thought they might be firing on a friendly ship. After confirming it was the Japanese, the attack resumed. Unfortunately, the *Astoria* took a direct hit, which set her ablaze. With the *Astoria* lighting up the dark night, she quickly became the preferred target of the enemy. She took many additional hits, with the resulting fires and dense smoke filling the beleaguered ship.

During the battle, Frank's duties were twofold. He alternated between helping the battle stations and keeping things rolling in the engine room. Frank was in the engine room when the order to evacuate the engine room was given. With the power out and smoke obstructing his vision and breathing, it was a challenge to find his way out to the relative safety of the deck. To add to the confusion, several bodies lay in his path to safety. Fortunately, the sailors had been trained for this situation. In training, sailors starting from the bottom of the ship had to find their way up to the deck blindfolded. Frank's brother Steve related that Frank had always said that this training undoubtedly saved his life.

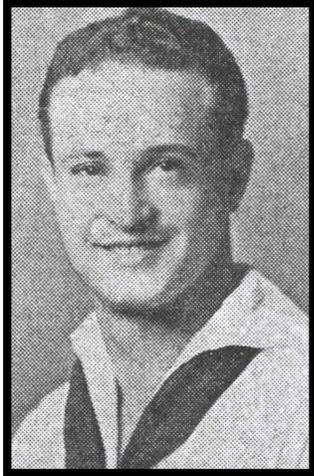
With the ship ablaze in the night, silhouetted on the horizon, the *Astoria* was spared, as the Japanese chose to suspend their attack and withdrew from the fight. This gave the crew a chance to save the ship. Frank and several shipmates made an attempt to return to the engine room to get the power restored, but the smoke was too intense. A bucket brigade was started to fight the raging fires. But in the midst of these efforts to save the ship, many troubles mounted. A group of wounded sailors who were placed on the deck had to be moved, as the heat underneath became too intense. As a result of the shelling, the ship began to list to port. Some holes on the port side of the ship that were initially above the water line now were below the water line and the ship began to take on water. As more water moved in, the list increased. Over the next several hours, explosions were heard below deck as the fire spread. Finally, the order was given to abandon ship. Several hours later, and after a last-ditch effort to save the ship, the *USS Astoria* at just a few minutes past noon on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942, sunk outside Guadalcanal. This area would eventually have so many sunk-enships from both sides that it became known as "Ironbound Sound".

In this battle, 235 of the 900 men onboard the *USS Astoria* were killed. The U.S. lost a number of ships and sustained many casualties in The Battle at Savo Island. But the Navy did achieve their objective which was to provide protection to allow men and supplies to move onto the island and that the transport boats used in the landings would survive to be used in other battles.

It would be just 10 weeks later, on the night of October 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942, that the men and supplies that were brought onto Guadalcanal by The *USS Astoria* and the other ships would hold back a suicidal Japanese attack to retake the airstrip in a battle that has come to be known as The Battle for Henderson Field. (Another Raritan guy fought heroically in that battle – and would be awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor. But that's another chapter.) With his ship sunk, Frank was sent home on leave. This gave him an opportunity to tell his story to the local newspapers. He would return to the Navy and later be assigned to The *USS Manatee*. This was a tanker that delivered fuel to the fleet in the Pacific.

While the above retelling of Frank Del Rocco's battle experience seems to be complete, it actually it is not. A 1968 article about the 5 Del Rocco brothers states "Three of the vessels upon which Frank served, including the heavy cruiser *Astoria* and an aircraft carrier, were sunk by the enemy." Since we know that his last ship, the *USS Manatee*, survived the war that leaves two other ships and their sinkings unaccounted for. And there is more evidence about another ship sinking, as related by Frank's sister Anna, who said that it was part of the family lore that Frank did not like General Douglas MacArthur. This was because Frank said that his ship was sunk when they needlessly had to wait around for General MacArthur. It would be highly unlikely that Frank would be referring to the sinking of the *USS Astoria*, as that ship was in the midst of an intensive battle when sunk.

# Frank Del Rocco Saw Action in the Navy Battles The Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal (Savo Island).



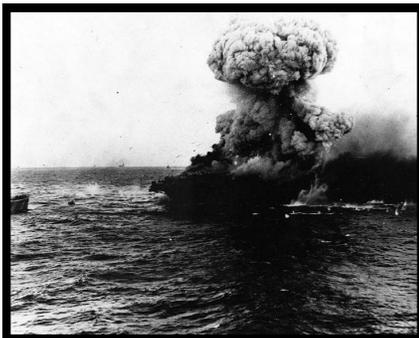
Frank Del Rocco barely escaped the sinking and burning ship. From the bottom of the ship he made it through the smoke and darkness to safety.



*USS Astoria* was sunk on August 9th, 1942 off of the coast of Guadalcanal.



The USS Astoria shot down four enemy planes at the battle of The Coral Sea.



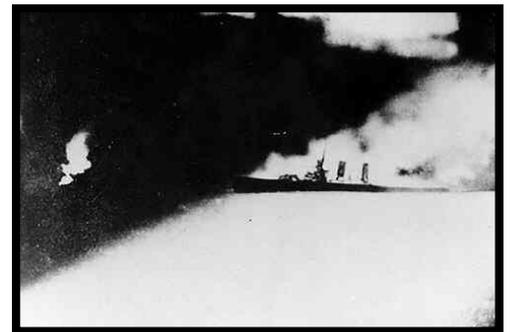
## Battle of The Coral Sea

This was the first sea battle fought by airplanes launched from aircraft carriers, where neither side's ships sighted or fired directly upon each other.



## Battle at Midway

*The USS Astoria* took damage as the Japanese aircraft bombs found their mark. Frank Del Rocco had a close call as he was stationed below in the boiler room when several near-misses rocked the ship.



## Naval battle at Guadalcanal (Savo Island)

The Astoria was sunk at this battle. Frank was in the bottom of the ship and had to find his way through the smoke to get to safety. He credited the training with saving his life.

# Anthony Musz

**25 years after his death his scrapbook & letters tell his story.**

**His daughters meet the Belgian family that he became friends with during the war.**

Anthony Musz (1918 – 1986), whose home was located at 20 Gaston Avenue in Raritan, seldom spoke of his experience in World War II. His daughters Cynthia and Cathy only knew that his job during the war was to bring equipment to the frontline troops. They remember that a parachute was stored in their attic. Dad related that parachutes like this were used to drop supplies to the frontline troops. Like many of his contemporaries, Anthony said very little about his wartime experience to his family. Upon his passing in 1986, it was assumed that the details of his war experiences would never be known.

Recently, two sources of information have come to light to tell his story. First, a long-forgotten scrapbook was discovered in the attic by his daughters. In addition, seventeen letters written to Raritan tavern owner Tony Orlando during the war were made public by the Orlando family. Anthony did not leave much of an oral history of his wartime service, instead he authored an extensive scrapbook that documented his many travels and experiences. In the scrapbook are dozens of photos, each with notes on the back listing the location, date, and names of those in the photos. Through these silent records, an intimate portrait of Anthony's wartime experience emerges.

His discharge papers show that he entered the service in March of 1942 -- just 3 months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He trained stateside for 21 months before being shipped out to England in January of 1944. The photos taken while he was stationed in England in early 1944 show that it was an orderly, relatively stress-free time in preparation for the invasion of Europe. Many soldier's recollections from this period were that it was a period of calm with a normal daily routine. The German air raids on England had been greatly reduced since the Battle of Britain in 1940 and 1941. During furloughs, the GIs visited the countryside and met the British girls, who were generally receptive to the Americans, as their men were gone into active service. A famous phrase from that time sums it up: "Oversexed, overpaid, and over here".

The letters Anthony wrote home at the time always mentioned Raritan and his family and how he thought about them a lot. He also wrote Tony Orlando to tell him that he had often corresponded with his Raritan buddy Frank Zanetti and his brothers, Joe and Mike. (Anthony's two brothers, Joe and Mike, also served overseas in World War II.) Anthony even managed to meet up with his brother Mike a few times in Europe. Often it took creative ways to meet. Once a trip on "trash detail" put him close enough to his brother to be able to stop and visit. Another time, Anthony was able to meet up with a Raritan guy who lived on the same street as him in Raritan. He wrote "I met Andy Sabol who lives but seven houses away and did we rave about the old town."

Like so many GIs stationed overseas, he cherished the hometown newspapers that were mailed to him. He followed the stories of the Raritan guys who were MIA. Every newspaper was read and re-read giving a sense of home and loved ones so far away. He wrote in January of 1945 "A copy of *The Messenger Gazette* dated 15<sup>th</sup> of June came today and I still enjoyed reading it."

Anthony expressed how proud he was of the bravery exhibited by some of the hometown boys, writing "Say that Johnny Soriano is a real hero too for he's doing a swell job out there in the Pacific. ... With guys like him and Basilone around, we'll have little trouble winning this crazy war."

After a stay in England, Anthony and his unit shipped out to France. Dates on the photos in the scrapbook show that while he did not storm the beaches on D-Day, his unit would soon connect with the advancing Allied forces. By October of 1944, his unit would continue to move through France getting close to the German border.

In November of 1944, the U.S. Forces would move out of France into Belgium liberating them from the oppression of the German occupation. The Belgian people were extremely grateful to the U.S. soldiers who had liberated them. Many GIs became close friends with Belgian families when the U.S. Army paused in Belgium to regroup. Anthony became close friends with the Estievenart family in Jambes, Belgium. Several photos show Anthony with the Estievenart family, who have four daughters and two sons. In many of these photos he is embracing or holding hands with the daughters. Wartime has often united people of various backgrounds in a common cause to defeat evil. Here a twenty-seven-year old GI from Raritan, New Jersey, became good friends with a family who live thousands of miles away in a small town in Belgium. In his letters, Anthony always calls the mom of Estievenart family his "laundry lady", as she did all his wash for free. However, she and her family were much more than that as he wrote "I've been spending most of my time at my laundry lady's home. There I learn a little French, get a midnight snack, and stay with four lovely girls."

**From the Scrapbook of Anthony Musz (20 Gaston Ave.)  
Photos taken while he was stationed in Belgium — Nov 44 to Mar 45**



**Anthony Musz**  
20 Gaston Ave.



**During the winter of 1945, the U.S. battled in the snowy conditions in the Belgium forest**

## Anthony Musz (continued)

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 1944, while he was still in Belgium, the Germans began an all-out counterattack known as *The Battle of the Bulge*. It was a savage attack through the Ardennes Forest in sub-zero weather that pushed the U.S. Army backward. Anthony wrote home at the time, stating “A bit rough here but then we don’t mind as long as it brings the war to an end soon. Things don’t look good for Christmas.” He went on to say how the Estievenart family was evacuated from their town when the Germans counterattacked. By the beginning of January, 1945, the U.S. Forces had regrouped, fought back effectively, and again pushed the Germans out of Belgium. Thankfully, the Estievenarts returned to their home a little after Christmas and had a joyous celebration. There are several photos of Anthony and the Estievenarts labeled “Christmas dinner with the Estievenarts”. The date listed was January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945. The pictures speak for themselves.

Anthony’s bond with the Estievenarts was extensive. He wrote that they threw him a birthday party. At the party, he celebrated a little too much writing “I really got in the bag.” The mom even knitted a bathing suit for him to swim in the Meuse River. When it came time to leave Belgium, he wrote “Had some swell times ... I am glad I had some pictures taken for it. ... going to miss my laundry lady most of all. I wrote a nice long letter telling her how grateful I am for her doing all my laundry and other things.”

This author, along with Anthony Musz’s daughters in 2012, were able to contact the surviving members of the Estievenart family in Belgium. They said that they loved Anthony dearly and had never forgotten him. The one son Ferdinand said that his kids now live in the U.S and that he would be glad to meet Anthony’s daughter. In the summer of 2013, Ferdinand Estievenart met with Anthony’s daughters Cathy and Cindy. It was a special day for everyone.

The scrapbook has a picture dated January 1945 that really stood out. The photo shows Anthony dressed for the snowy conditions of Belgium at the time. For students of World War II, the photo of him with the long heavy coat, boots, battle helmet, with the snow on the ground is instantly recognizable from the Battle of The Bulge in Belgium.

In April of 1945, Anthony and his unit advanced into Germany. One photo shows a damaged German building that was adopted for their headquarters. Another one shows Anthony and eight others with a signpost saying Rheinberg (a city in Germany). A letter he wrote during this time tells that his duties were to help set up a POW camp for the German soldiers that had surrendered toward the end of the war.

In September of 1945, the war had ended and Anthony was again stationed in Belgium. He was granted a seven-day leave to visit the boardwalk area of the Riviera in the city of Nice, France. Picturesque photos are found of the waterfront area and of Anthony on the beach. Vacation time was indeed earned after years of war.

Before returning home from Europe, one photo shows him at an Allied cemetery in Luxemburg. There, he visited the grave of fellow Raritan soldier Peter Petras. In one of his letters, he tells how it took some persistence in getting to this cemetery. On one attempted trip to the gravesite, the pilot could not land as the local airstrip was out of commission. But in a follow-up letter, he writes that he finally got to the cemetery and had a picture taken of him at the gravesite. He sent this picture to the Petras family. Remarkably, the photos in his scrapbook even document his trip home. He wrote on the front of the picture of his transport ship “Going Home Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945.”

After the war, he would marry Elvira Gaburo in 1951 and settle at 410 Raritan Avenue in Raritan. They would have 3 children. A son Thomas was born in 1954 and identical twin daughters Cynthia and Cathy were born in 1957. (Today both daughters live on Anderson Street in Raritan. )

Anthony embarked on a lifelong career with the U.S. Postal Service, working primarily at the Raritan Post Office. Always a hard worker, for years he had a second job as a bartender. He worked locally at several places including the Centennial Tavern, where he worked for Tony Orlando, the gentlemen he wrote many letters to during the war.

**Anthony Musz would made friends with a family in Belgium when the U.S. army stopped to rest after liberating the country.**



**Jacqueline Estievenart and her family never forgot Anthony Musz.**



**Jacqueline, just before her death in 2012**



**Decades after Anthony Musz's death, his (identical twin) daughters, Cathy and Cindy, would locate the Estievenart family in Belgium that their dad had made friends with. The surviving family members said that they loved Anthony dearly. Cathy and Cindy met with Ferdinand Estievenart in 2013.**



**Ferdinand Estievenart in 1944**



**A holiday dinner with the Estievenart family. Anthony is on the right in the back. Next to his favorite Jacqueline, of course. Ferdinand, who would later meet Anthony's daughters, is 3rd on the left.**



**The bonds that developed between the U.S. soldiers and the Belgian people can be seen in this photo**

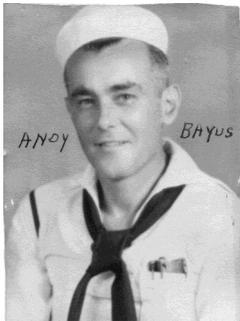
# Letters to Tony Orlando

## The Raritan guys share their thoughts about “BOOT CAMP”.

The Raritan servicemen fighting overseas wrote hundreds of letters home to Tony Orlando expressing their thanks and sharing their thoughts and experiences on this epic conflict. Because of censorship, which was heavily enforced, they could not say anything specific about their location, weapons, or details of battles fought. But their words showed their feelings toward “Army Life”, thoughts of home, and the destruction they witnessed.

There were many common topics in these letters. One of them was getting used to life in the military. While history books today just tell about the battles fought, most time in the military, especially during the first year, was spent taking orders and learning to adhere to the discipline of military service.

Even this patriotic bunch we deservingly call “The Greatest Generation” had some gripes about boot camp, as we can see from the quotes below.”



**Andy Bayus**  
(59 E Somerset Street) gave this short analysis of his first day in the service: *“You ought to see the haircut they give you here in camp. You get on the chair and in 10 seconds you are out.”*



**John Cox**  
(32 Anderson Street) wrote home from boot camp: *“I don't have much time to myself yet, as I'm too new, and they work us pretty hard. We have to make our beds, wash our clothes, scrub the floor on our hands and knees, etc. When I get back, I'll sure make someone a good wife.”*



**Benny Barone**  
Tony Orlando's brother in-law *“This army life is not so bad after you get used to it, but it is pretty tough at the start.”*



**Tom Benvenuti**  
(56 First Avenue) commented that even writing a letter home in boot camp was not that easy: *“Darn I am sweating like hell while writing — all there is here is sand and some cactus plants.”*

# Letters to Tony Orlando

## The Raritan guys share their thoughts about “EXPERIENCES in WAR”.



**Matthew Orlando** (Tony's son) as his unit was marching toward Germany wrote: *"I am now living in a house. It is really a swell break for us. I expect to take a shower in a couple days. I haven't showered in a couple of months."*



**Peter Melnyk** (524 Bell Avenue) in 1945 was assigned to the heavily destroyed Philippines. His thoughts were: *"Well Tony they got me now in the Philip-pines. I have been here a few months and I saw enough of it."*



**John Strelko** who was with the U.S. Army that had liberated a war ravaged Belgium told of how grateful the local people were. *"We are in Belgium. The people are very good to us. What little they have they are willing to share with the soldiers."*

**Jack Torpey** had a simple statement about what he had seen: *"This thing called war is really an awful state of things. Tony, and there are not many who can know what I mean, who have not been in it. It's really lousy."*

Before the Allied invasion of France, which is today known as D-Day, the censors were somewhat lenient, as the pending massive invasion was no secret as it was the main topic of all news reports.

\***Frank Zanetti** (45 Gaston Avenue) wrote home on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944, just 4 days before the invasion, saying: *"As you know by reading the papers that the biggest show on earth will take place sometime in the near future. I expect to be in that show."*

Just 13 days later, another letter from **Frank Zanetti** dated June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944, 9 days after the D-Day invasion, showed that indeed he was in "the biggest show on earth". This letter gave some idea of what he had seen and been through:

*"Well Tony it has finally started and I am in it. There is very little I can say about it right now. I will say that I know now what war is like. I have had several experiences. I have seen ruins which are caused by war and needlessly to say I have seen the dead. In spite of everything Tony it hasn't been too bad for me so far."*

After D-Day the Allies fought on towards Paris liberating the city. **Frank Zanetti** was one of the soldiers who went through Paris soon after the U.S. Army had liberated the city away from the Germans. He wrote about the reaction that the French had to the arrival of the Americans:

*"Passed through Paris about 2 weeks ago. Boy sure is a nice place. ... The people there are sure glad to see us. They would swarm all over you shaking your hand and kissing. And the girls are pretty too."*



**Frank Kelly** (11 Gaston Avenue) who identified his location on his letter as "an island with Japs" wrote: *"Our food consists of rations now, but we hope to get better food soon. Those rations are alright for a few days, but after that, they are terrible."*

One letter from Frank had a line that sounded like he might be on vacation: *"The island I am now on is not so bad."* But his second sentence brought in the reality of war *"There are still quite a few japs left and some hard fighting ahead. They have some pretty good equipment and are still full of fight."* He closed his letter off by using a phrase which might be a just an expression in peace time, but was all too accurate when he wrote: *"Well Tony it's almost dark and lights have to go out, so it's back to my hole for the night."*

# Letters to Tony Orlando

## The Raritan guys write about PATRIOTISM and HOME.



**Peter Melnyk** (524 Bell Ave.)  
 Reflected on the changing priorities that he had now taken on:  
*"Well Tony baseball season is just around the corner and I guess I will miss it again this year.... I had to hang up my suit just like the other boys did, and play a bigger game. This is one game I am going to win by a big score, a game for Freedom, and we won't lose."*



**Julius Yuhus**  
 had a positive spin on the Marine Corp:  
*"Mr. Orlando this is a good place for young men in the U. S. Marine Corp because it really makes a good man out of you. I'll have some pictures made of myself when I get home and I'll give you one for the frame."*



**John Basilone** (113 First Ave.)  
 in September of 1944 wrote:  
*"I'm a married man now, also I am back overseas. Tony Cirello is also down here with me. It sure is nice to have someone from your home town with you. We just got back from seeing a movie together. Well how is everything back in Raritan - Okay? Tony and I are now waiting for Al Gaburo to get down here with us."*



**Rocco Pomponio**  
 wrote:  
*"Well Tony everything by me is fine, working like hell but I don't mind. It is for a good cause."*



**Al Gaburo** could picture life back at Raritan in The Centennial Tavern when he wrote:  
*"Tony its Sunday afternoon and I could just picture the boys at The Centennial. Some busy at the bar, others playing cards, some playing shuffle board, and some just hanging around. I often think about that, for it does bring back pleasant memories. However, I am anticipating that this war shall end in the very near future so that I may again join the gang."*



**Sal Barone** wrote:  
*"Someday I and the rest of the boys will be back in the old town and enjoy what we are now fighting for."*



**Rocco Pellechio**  
 (17 Raritan Ave.)  
*"No matter where a fellow goes or what he does there is no better town than the one he has come from, be it big or small."*



**Michael DeCicco**  
 (10 Anderson St.)  
*"The Raritan boys are well represented out here and we are really giving them hell. I hope and pray that it will soon be over so we can all get back home and all the boys get together"*

**Frank Kelly** (11 Gaston Ave.)  
 paid a good tribute to his hometown.  
*"I sure miss all the fellows and the town, the more of this world I see, the more I appreciate Raritan."*

**Fred Lapinsky** wrote how he boasted of his hometown while overseas:  
*"I often tell the boys in my company of what a nice little town Raritan is and of the Raritan River where I had a lot of fun when I was a boy. It is a swell town and I hope to be back there soon."*

# Letters to Tony Orlando

## Raritan guys write about “THE HORRORS of WAR”

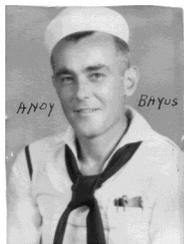


**Joe Sian** (110 W Somerset Street) He wrote from his ship in the Pacific about two of the guys who made the supreme sacrifice: *“I got a letter from my sister saying that Joseph Spatt of Gaston Ave. was killed in action. I was very sorry to hear that. He was only 19 years old too. That makes the 13th one killed in Raritan. That's a lot for a small town like Raritan. I wish this damn war would end soon.”*

*“My wife wrote and told me that Joe Lamastro is missing in action. I was very sorry to here that. He was out here with me, but I never got a chance to see him. It's a shame because he had a wife and kid.”*



**Dominic Insana** (16 W Somerset Street) saw what the Germans had done in France: *“Well here I am in France and it sure is a dreary place, most of the town is all shot to pieces, all you can see is buildings blown down and the streets are all full of stones, dirt, and bricks. Everywhere you look you see nothing but destruction ... it is pretty hard on the people who live here.”*



**Andy Bayus**, when moving through a town in France, observed how destroyed the town was and was impressed by the cemetery that was made for those who lost their lives trying to save the town. *“Went to the town that was here and it's all shot up — nothing left but the walls of the buildings. Then went to the cemetery where they buried the boys that were killed here and you should see how nice they have it laid out.”*



**Art Soriano** (Nevius Street) – in January of 1945 wrote:

*“I spent xmas at sea and New Years in France ... and now somewhere in Belgium. They have sure messed up plenty of villages ... most of the places we went through got a taste of war.”*

As they moved closer to Germany, **Art Soriano** again commented *“I could write more often, but ... what I wanted to write they would censor out, so there is no use trying. We recently moved to Germany, all places look the same to me, all banged up and deserted.”*



**Henry Matties** (13 Anderson Street) as his unit moved into Germany in early 1945, wrote: *“Every town we have gone through so far is nothing but side walls and a few sticks left in the roof, and if it don't end pretty soon the whole German nation will be living in pup tents.”*

**Frank Kelly**, who was sent copies of the local papers while overseas, wrote: *“I get the Raritan Valley News and the Somerset Gazette. It sort of keeps you posted on all the things at home. I was very sorry to read about the Raritan boys that were killed in action. I can understand how their family feels, so Tony lets all of us get on our knees and pray to God to end this terrible war so that no more of our boys will be lost.”*

## Raritan Guys Meet Relatives in Italy

In mid-1943, the Italian Emperor and the citizens of Italy rose up and overthrew their brutal dictator Benito Mussolini. With Fascism overthrown, the Italian government surrendered and offered to switch sides and fight with the Allies. A strange offer, but understandable — as they had initially been forced into an alliance with Germany. Initially their offer to switch sides did not mean much, as the Germans still controlled most of Italy. However, the U.S. had begun the invasion of Italy and were liberating the country, one province at a time. By mid-1944, many regions in Italy had been liberated from German control. This gave some of the Raritan GIs stationed in Italy a chance to meet relatives — ones they had never met before. In this era, travel overseas (even without a war) was minimal. People who left Italy to come to the U.S. for a better life sometimes never saw their relatives again. They would stay in touch through letters and photos, but never meet again.

**Dominick Menci**, of 27 Thompson Street, used a break in the war to contact and meet his Italian relatives whom he had never met. He had heard so much about them from his family. Dominick was a mechanic in the Army Air Force. From his base, he was able to make the journey to the Italian village of Ruvo del Monte to meet them. It was quite a trip — first by airplane, then by motorcycle, and the last leg by foot. He met his maternal grandmother, who still lived in the same home that his mother grew up in. Also, there were two aunts, an uncle, many cousins, and some second (even third) cousins. They were so thrilled to meet their American relative that they held a dinner-dance for him. The main course at this dinner was, of course, home-cooked spaghetti. Dominick wrote home that the relatives were very jolly and they were all very nice to him. It was like a dream to meet them. He also wrote that they had felt the effects of the war. One of his cousin's husbands had been killed in the war. They needed clothes, but any new clothes were impossible to get due to the war. When Dominick reluctantly had to return to his base, his Uncle Vito arranged for him to travel by mule for the first 20 miles. His Aunt Carmella gave him some food to be eaten on the journey back — that special dish — a cooked pigeon.

**Frank Esola** was also able to meet his Italian relatives for the first time during the war. He contacted his Uncle Dominick, whom he had never met. They agreed to meet at an Army hospital close by. When Frank saw his uncle arrive at the meeting point, he knew who he was right away, as he looked so much like another of his uncles. After a quick introduction, they went on an hour's drive to the town of Tonchiati. When they arrived, Frank was amazed by the reception. He wrote: "The people gathered around me like I was God come to help them. They all tried to kiss me. Inside the house, it was jammed with people. They had to lock the door to keep the neighbors out. Grandma was so happy to meet me she started crying. They asked me a billion questions about the folks in Raritan." He would go on to write how the family had not felt the war too badly, stating "they still had their home." (In wartime Italy, many Italian homes were destroyed by the Germans.)

Tony Orlando's nephew, **Frank Fontenello**, was with the Army Air Force. He was another GI who was able to meet with his Italian relatives. He traveled to the village of Angri in the province of Salerno where his uncle Tony Orlando was born. (Tony had left Angri to come to this country in 1902, when he was 10 years old, with his mother and seven other children — one of them would become Frank Fontenello's mother.) In Angri, Frank would meet relatives that he had only heard about and a few relatives he had never heard of. He enjoyed the experience, writing back to Tony, "I was thrilled to find someone way over here that used to know your mom and uncle when they were small." In Angri, he met his great uncle Matthew, who was a priest in town. Upon visiting his uncle's church he wrote, "I think the church is really beautiful — there's a small dome where the heads of angels are carved-out real nice." To Frank's surprise, he met his grand-father's sister who was still alive in her 80s. He never even knew that his grand-father had a sister. In one home there was a photo of his grandfather on display. That same photo hung on his wall at home. Frank spent a lot of time with Uncle Matthew, exchanging some old stories and discussed how many children each family member now had.

# After the Germans were cleared out of Italy, some Raritan guys met their Italian relatives for the first time.



Dominick Menci towers over his aged grandmother in front of her stone house in Italy.

It was a long way from 27 Thompson Street in Raritan to the Italian village of Ruvo del Monte. Dominick Menci traveled by plane, motorcycle, foot, and by mule to see his grandmother for the first time.

The photo to the left was in the Raritan Valley News.



Dominick Menci

## The Raritan Valley News

Raritan's weekly newspaper did a fabulous job covering the war. It was owned by Warren Glaser—the office was at 8 Wall Street, Raritan.



### They're in the Army Now!

Sam Lipoma, who is stationed with a Coast Guard unit in Brooklyn, spent his weekend leave in town.

Thomas M'netti of Wall St. has returned after visiting his son, Corp. Jules Minetti, at Myrtle Beach, S. C. Corp. Minetti, who is in the Air Corps, received his preliminary training at Chanute Field. He has also served in California.

Pvt. Thomas Winsor had a 24-hour leave from Fort Dix Saturday, which he spent with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Winsor of Cornell Blvd.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Swartzmiller of Loeser Ave. received Easter greetings from their son, Corp. Leo Swartzmiller, who is with an infantry unit at Camp Blanding, Fla.

Anthony Santoro and Rocco Matteis, both of whom were recently inducted into the Army, are now stationed at Fort Jackson, S. C. Pvt. Matteis has been placed in a medical battalion.

Pvt. James Mancini, son of Mrs. Mary Mancini, returned to Biloxi, Miss., Monday after a six-day furlough.

Pvt. John Jordan Jr., of Bradley, is now stationed at Fort Jackson, S. C.

Lieut. Franklin D. Dexter, son of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin C. Dexter, Mt. Horeb Rd., Martinsville, is now stationed at St. Lucia, British West Indies, where he is attached to the Coast Artillery.

### The Honor Roll DEAD

Robert David Apgar, Seaman 1/c, of Green Knoll, killed in action, South Pacific, Nov. 13, 1942, aboard USS Juneau

Sgt. Walter Jacobs, Railroad Ave. Killed July 3, 1943, Needles, Calif., in plane crash.

Pvt. Francis Barcar, LaGrange St. Killed in action Aug. 6, 1943, North Africa Area.

Pfc. Philip DeLorenzo, Anderson St. Killed in action, Sept. 9, 1943, Italy.

Pfc. Dominic Baldini, 25 First Ave. Killed in action, Sept. 23, 1943, Italy.

Sgt. Morton Levine, Martinsville, killed in a raid over Munster, Germany, Oct. 10, 1943.

Lt. John J. Gentile, 81 Thompson St. Killed Dec. 29, 1943, in the North Atlantic Area in plane crash.

Sgt. John Nevinsky, Bridge-water Township, killed in action, Jan. 25, 1944, in the Mediterranean Area.

First Lt. Abram B. Granetz, 84 Somerset St., died Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, Feb. 6, 1944.

Staff Sgt. George Bergen, Findernie, died March 23, 1944, of wounds received Sept. 8, 1943, at Salerno, Italy.

First Lieut. Alfred Zanoni, 62 W. Somerset St.; died Mar. 20, 1944, in So. Pacific Area.

Cpl. Rocco Scarponi, 112 First Ave., killed in action in North Africa Area Apr. 20, 1944.

Cpl. Rocco F. DeMelo, 54 Thompson St., killed in action in North Africa Area Apr. 20, 1944.

Seaman 1-c John Mills, Martinsville, killed in plane crash at Beaufort Air Base, S. C., June 2, 1944.

Pfc. Frank P. Esposito, 7 Thompson St., died in Hawaii June 11, 1944.

(This box is run as a constant reminder to those on the Home Front of the sacrifices made by our boys on the battle fronts.—The Editor.)

Part of their war coverage was regular columns "Our Fighting Men", "The Honor Roll" and "They're in the Army Now!".

RARITAN VALLEY NEWS

## Our Fighting Men




**Kovac Brothers Serve Army, Navy**

The Kovac family of 73 Anderson St. has a representative in both services: Joseph, an Aviation Machine's Mate 2/C, is at Hutchinson, Kansas, and Andrew, a new inductee, is taking basic at Camp Blanding, Fla.

Joseph is on land after two and a half years of Pacific duty aboard an aircraft carrier. One of the places at which he saw action is Saitan. He joined the Navy in June, 1942, and trained at Ft. Bragg, N. C. He is with an Infantry division at Jacksonville, Fla., before going to the Pacific. At Hutchinson he is in the metal shop and works on B-24's. Joseph is 23 years old.

Andrew, who is 18, was inducted after graduation from Somerville High in June. Both are brothers-in-law of Pfc. Frank Esposito, who lost his life in Hawaii in June. They are the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Kovac.

**Auciello Boys Fight Global War**

One of the doughboys smacking the Nazis in Belgium is Pfc. Sal Auciello, 19 First Ave., who arrived in France a month ago. The young soldier was inducted May 5, 1943, and trained at Ft. Bragg, N. C. He is with an Infantry division at Jacksonville, Fla., before going to the Pacific. At Hutchinson he is in the metal shop and works on B-24's. Joseph is 23 years old.

Andrew, who is 18, was inducted after graduation from Somerville High in June. Both are brothers-in-law of Pfc. Frank Esposito, who lost his life in Hawaii in June. They are the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Kovac.

**BARRACK BAGS**

The Navy-in-the-Air will soon be bolstered by the addition of William Zaninelli, 43 E. Somerset St. He's leaving athletics and pop's newstand to be a Navy flyer.

Learning the ropes (literally!) at Sampson, N. Y., is Elmer Perantoni, 84 Second Ave. Joined Nov. 16. He got his sheepskin from S. H. S. in June.

Two new Army rookies are Jerry DeMelo, 20 Douglas St., who is taking basic at Camp Blanding, Fla., and Iador Grasso, First Ave., who is at Camp Croft, S. C.

Ye Editor got Xmas cards from: Donald R. Zaninelli, getting back his strength at Tilton General; Fred and Ferruccio Perantoni, two brother gobs; Tony Musz, in Belgium; Pat DiPaolo, abroad a flat-top; Jim Valeri, who sent one on V-mail from the Pacific; and from Bill Schaub.

John Russo, a pharmacist's mate in the South Pacific pens a Yuletide note and a reminder that he still wants to read the NEWS. Admits he didn't send his new address, but he's forgiven. John's home is at 49 Anderson St.—when he's not battling the Japs.

Another Pacific writer is Seaman 2-c William Neckoruk, 16 Colfax St., who says there are long lapses between copies of the NEWS "but it doesn't make much difference as one is always glad to hear about old friends and home."

## The Death of John Basilone

On February 19th, 1945, the U.S. was set to invade the island of Iwo Jima. This island was just 600 miles from Japan. That was much closer than any other island that they currently had control of. To prepare for the invasion on the morning of the attack, the naval bombardment was so intense that the view of the island was partially obscured. Flames and debris shot high in the air. The noise and the bombing was described by one soldier as indescribable. While waiting in the transport vehicles, some Marines hoped this final bombing would allow them to take the island with little resistance. However, these Japanese warriors were well dug-in and heavily armed. There were 22,000 of them and almost all were prepared to die in the upcoming battle.

The U.S. bombing stopped only minutes before the first U.S. invasion force landed on the beach at 9:05 AM. John Basilone's group landed around 9:30 AM. They were surprised to find little opposition. They wondered "where were the Japanese?" Had the bombing wiped out the enemy? The Marines got up on the beach and noticed that their feet could barely move in the soft, black, volcanic sand. For one hour, the U.S. was able to get their transports up to the beach and unload the men without major resistance. Then, with the beach crowded with U.S. soldiers, the Japanese began their counterattack. Suddenly, the Japanese, from their hidden blockhouses began firing away at the exposed U.S. troops. This was their planned strategy. Hold off from firing immediately, then when there were thousands of U.S. soldiers grouped together on the beach, start blasting them. An estimated two-thousand Japanese were gunning down the American forces. They fired everything from machine guns to heavy artillery shells. Many of the Japanese strong positions were in the 550-foot Mount Suribachi. This allowed them to easily pick off the "sitting duck" Marines, who had no cover and very little footing on the beach. The Marines tried to dig into the sand to provide cover, but the volcanic sand was just too soft. For each shovel they dug out, it seemed two shovels filled back in the hole. The Marines were getting annihilated. The noise and the carnage were everywhere. Survivors later wondered how anyone survived the initial Japanese barrage. The U.S. forces were on the beach, but they had little or no cover. They were still disorganized, and had not yet gotten enough heavy equipment ashore to defend against this type of attack. Many hundreds of Marines were killed or wounded. The survivors were bogged down with the little cover they could find. The beach became a graveyard of dead Marines and a salvage yard of wrecked trucks and jeeps. One Marine on the beach summed it up as he told his fellow soldiers, "this is a fucking slaughter." Those would be his last words, as he was hit with a mortar shell moments later.

Many clergy and priests charged onto *Iwo Jima* with the Marines. Father Paul Bradley, the priest who had married John and Lena, was one of them. He had volunteered for a combat assignment, saying that a combat area was a place where a priest should be. He was there at *Iwo Jima* on Day One to provide comfort and administer "last rites" to the dying men. He told his story in the book *Flags of our Fathers*. He said "I was young and didn't think about the danger to me. And I was too busy crawling from dying man to dying man. It was always, 'Father over here!' Once I was kneeling in the sand administering to a guy who had been hit. There was a loud thud! His eyes closed, he had been hit again, and was now dead. 'Father over here', I heard someone else call. I went on to the next one."

The troops had trained for years, but nothing could prepare them for what was happening all around them. The soldiers would later say how frustrated they were that they could not see the enemy to fight back. The Japanese counterattack had stalled the U.S. invasion. Most Marines were hiding in the sand. The beach was littered with damaged vehicles, equipment, and dead soldiers. Further landings of more men and equipment were put on hold. The invasion was not moving. Brave men with leadership ability were needed to rally the troops. One of these men was John Basilone. Many survivors of the battle recall that in the midst of the battle, with everyone hunkered down in the sand, there was one Marine out in the open, running around, directing men. It was John Basilone. He first guided a tank out of a mine field. Only a few tanks came ashore and they were needed to knock out Japanese blockhouses.

Charles Tatum describes John Basilone's action in his book *Red Blood, Black Sand*. "I noticed a lone Marine walking back and forth on the shore, among hundreds of prone figures, kicking asses, shouting cuss words and demanding, Move Out! Get Your Butts Off the Beach. He gave the Marine Corp signal to follow him. A group of men responded. Fascinated, I wondered why he wasn't digging in like the rest of us. As he advanced, I recognized the solitary Marine was John Basilone."

John had noticed that that particular Japanese bunker had been effectively shooting mortar shells and raging deadly fire upon the U.S. troops. This enemy strong position "had to go". John found and organized some machine gunners along with demolition men and directed them toward the bunker. First, the Marines fired on the bunker causing the Japanese to take a defensive position and close the gun port. Then the soldiers advanced toward the bunker. John Basilone instructed a demolition man to blow a hole in the concrete structure, while others gave cover against other nearby enemy positions. The demo-man charged the bunker and quickly tossed his explosives at the base of the closed metal door and ran for his life. A large explosion went off, opening part of the bunker. Basilone then told the enthused machine gunners to hold their fire and directed a flamethrower operator to charge the pit. The flame throwing unit, worn on a soldier's back, weighed seventy pounds. The brave flamethrower charged the pit as quickly as he could, stuck his nozzle in the pit and ignited the flame. This flame was an effective weapon. It contained napalm, which leaves a burning gel on those that it touches. Some of the Japanese soldiers ran out of the pit screaming as they tried to wipe away the jellied gasoline that was burning them. John Basilone cut them down with a machine gun. Fellow soldier Charles Tatum, who held the ammunition belt for John Basilone recalls "Basilone's eyes had a fury I had never seen before. Rigid-hard clenched jaw, sweat glistening on his forehead; he was not an executioner, but a soldier performing his duty. For me and others ... who saw Basilone's leadership and courage during our assault, his example was overwhelming."

After knocking out the bunker, Basilone led twenty men off the exposed beach area to a location where they could take some cover and plan their next move. They were inside a crater that appeared to be made earlier by a U.S. bomb. John Basilone judged that they would need more men to advance against the next Japanese blockhouse. He

**Two Marines, Bob Casey of Bound Brook and Tony Cirello of Raritan, pay respects at the grave on Iwo Jima of John Basilone.**



Deeply regret to inform you that your son, Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone, USMC, was killed in action February 19th at Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, in the performance of his duty and service to his country. When information is received regarding burial, you will be notified. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy.

General Alexander Vandegrift

## The Death of John Basilone continued

ordered the men to stay while he went back to get more men and some heavy machine guns. The young soldiers waited and watched Basilone run back to gather more men. John Basilone gathered some troops and weapons and started back across the beach to the waiting soldiers. A Japanese mortar shell landed right in the middle of John and a few of the men he was leading. John's reported last words, just before the shell hit him were printed in *The New York Times*, they were "All right, you guys, let's go on in there and set up these guns for firing". The shell killed several men next to John instantly, but John held on. One soldier who witnessed his injury described it as being very bad. John Basilone's only chance was if the medics could get him off the beach to a hospital ship. However, at the moment, there were no more ships coming in or going out. The beach was in chaos. There was a logjam of ships, wreckage, and bodies. No more ships would be landing until the U.S. was more organized and the incoming ships were not sitting ducks. The medic shot John with morphine to comfort him. At one point some men stopped to gaze at the fallen hero, but a sergeant yelled them off, not wanting to see them get shot while grieving for him. John clung to life for around thirty minutes before dying.

Word started to circulate among the Marines that John Basilone had been killed. Several men recalled that this rallied the Marines. Before they were hunkered down, afraid to advance, but now they rose and charged the Japanese positions with renewed energy. They took casualties, but started to complete their objectives, foot-by-foot, blockhouse-by-blockhouse. One soldier, Adolph Brusa, who witnessed John's action that day, said in an interview for the video *The Saga of Manila John*, "John Basilone was killed at *Iwo Jima* because he was a God Damn Hero. While everyone was hugging the ground, he was out there leading the men."

The first family member to be informed of John's death was his brother George, whose Marine unit landed at *Iwo Jima* a few days after John had been killed. George had just arrived and a Sergeant who was assigned to deliver the news to George, saw the name "Basilone" printed on George's backpack and called to him, "George, I need to talk to you." Since George had not met this Sergeant before, he became suspicious, and responded "How come you know my first name." The Sergeant then told George of his brother's death. George wanted to go to the gravesite to pay his last respects. John's back-pack, which he discarded during the battle at *Iwo Jima*, was found in the sand by Tony Cirello, a soldier who also came from Raritan. He would later give it to George.

News of John's death, which had occurred on February 19th, 1945, did not reach home until March 8th, 1945, a Thursday. The military's standard procedure is to notify the family before the media. However, in John's case, something got mixed-up. The first notification of John's death came to the family when a reporter, on the morning of March 8th, got in touch with John's brother Angelo's wife, who lived on Second Avenue in Raritan. She quickly went over to the family home at 113 First Avenue to ask John's mother Dora if it was true. Dora had not yet received any information, so they clung to hope that the reporter was in error. However, ten minutes later, a *Western Union* telegram from the War Department was delivered to John's father Salvatore at his new job at *Holcombe and Holcombe* on West Main Street in Somerville.

John's father quickly called home and delivered the tragic news. Dora was in a state of shock and described as being on the verge of collapse. Salvatore quickly came home and soon word of John's death spread throughout the town. When a local Raritan boy died in the war, the word always spread quickly. Police Chief Lorenzo Rossi went around town informing people of John's death. The station master at the Raritan Train Station told commuters as they walked to the train. The church bells at *St. Ann's* were rung. Father Amedeo Russo of *St. Ann's* soon arrived at the house to comfort the family. The Basilone house was quickly flooded with visitors offering their sympathy.

Back then, the two local papers, *The Somerset Messenger Gazette* and *The Plainfield-Courier News*, were printed and distributed in the afternoon, so they were able to report the story the same day. It was the lead story on the front page of both papers.

The Basilone family and the town of Raritan grieved over the loss of their hero.

*The New York Times* wrote about John, "Being a Marine fighting man, and therefore a realist, Sergeant Basilone must have known in his heart that his luck could not last forever. Yet he chose to return to battle."

Two days later, on Saturday, March 10th, a memorial mass for John Basilone was held at *St. Ann's Church*. The church was beyond capacity — with servicemen home on leave, neighbors, townspeople, members of the local VFW and American Legion, family, and even some folks who had traveled from out of state to pay their respects.

For his bravery in action at *Iwo Jima*, John was posthumously awarded *The Navy Cross*, the second-highest award a soldier can receive.

# When John Basilone was killed on Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the Raritan guys expressed their feelings in their letters to Tony Orlando.



**Joe Rita**  
(43 First Street)

He gave a nice tribute:  
*"Johnny Basilone's death came as quite a shock. He had plenty of guts and went out as a great champion. They don't come any tougher."*



**Rocco Pomponio**

added: *"Well Tony I'm very sorry to hear the bad news about John Basilone. But God may help him and guide the rest of us. And also to make this war come to an end very soon."*



**Jimmy Valeri,**  
(41 First Avenue)

Jimmy had the opportunity to talk to George Basilone, John's brother who was also serving overseas in the Marines. He wrote this:  
*"Mrs. Fox said George Basilone was down there for a few days. I went down to see him. In the afternoon we sat around and talked. George told me all about how Johnny was killed. He was only a short distance away but it was days before he knew anything about it. Some of the other boys knew it but were afraid to tell him. The kid looks pretty good for one who has been through so much."*



**Al Gaburo**

(500 Frelinghuysen Avenue)

*The death of John Basilone has been a very severe blow to me. It is something that is hard to believe. We will see him no more. Those of us that knew him can well remember his fine qualities. His name will go down in history and will be a living tribute to every boy in America. He will live forever.*

*Father Russo (of St Ann's in Raritan) has made preparations for a mass for John Basilone on the morning of May 19<sup>th</sup>. While mass is being said in Raritan, I will kneel here and pay my respects at the same time.*

*John's brother George and I visited John's grave on Iwo Jima many times. It was hard to do, but we had to pay our respects to one that was so close to us. We mourn his death as we do many others that made the supreme sacrifice. May his soul rest in peace.*

Judge George Allgair was quoted in *The Somerset Messenger Gazette*, *"The boys in Raritan all idolized John Basilone and his death seems unreal. We have a very deep sense of loss."*

Former (Municipality) Mayor Joseph Navatto commented on a talk he had with John on his last home visit, *"he said he couldn't take it easy while his friends fought on. He had to get back to the fight. If his number came up, that was part of the game. He was a tribute to this great country of ours, an American, a Marine, a hero who gave his life for the country he loved."*

Father Amedeo Russo of St. Ann's said in *The Plainfield Courier News*, *"John Basilone had a high sense of patriotic duty, which impelled him to give all in his service to his country. He has left a noble example of unselfish devotion to duty."*

## Philip Orlando – Soldier and Artist

Philip Orlando of 41 East Somerset Street showed a passion for art from his earliest years. At age 5, he would shape the sand in his sandbox into various shapes. As he got older and played outside in Raritan, he found large stones that he brought home to carve faces on. As his art skills and creativity advanced, he went to the quarry at The Chimney Rock in Bridgewater to obtain special stones to work on. When he was a young teenager, Doris Duke was so impressed with him that she let him on her property anytime so that he could observe the extensive artwork and creative landscaping on the estate. In his early years, Philip had no formal art training – he experimented and learned things on his own. It was after he graduated from Somerville High School that he went for formal training, attending *The Leonardo Da Vinci School of Art* in New York City. There he studied under famed sculptor Artillo Piccirilli. He would also study at other art studios, including *The Art Student's League* and *The Beaux Arts Institute* in New York City. A famous artist, Max Kalish, was impressed with him and chose him as an assistant. After gaining valuable experience Philip (in 1939-1940) won several awards for his artwork.

When the draft was implemented in 1940, Philip drew a low number, which insured he would be drafted early. As many in that situation did, he joined the Army (in January of 1941) before being drafted, so that he could join on his own terms. Even during Army training the artist in him was always alive. One day while out in the field on training maneuvers in the Carolinas, he discovered clay in the ground. Philip just had to put it to good use, so he used it to make busts. The busts that he would create were of the General of that division and of the Commanding Officer of his unit. Since he was sculpting busts of his superiors, resources seemed to be sent his way rather quickly. The officers gave him a place for a studio in an old unused officer's club and encouraged him to work during off-hours. He was given plaster, bronze oil paint, and shellac. Interestingly, he was then a private, yet he had officers sit for him as they posed for their bust. During these sessions one wonders if he told the officers to "sit up straight" or "wipe that smile off your face".

In addition to the busts of his officers, he created other artwork. This brought him much attention and critical acclaim, both inside and outside the army. At home in Raritan, the local newspapers printed a few articles about the artwork he had done. In the Army, he was given a citation of thanks. The citation read:  
*Private Orlando sculptured and painted a beautiful plaque, replica of the regimental crest, as an ornament for the office of the regimental commander. He also, in spite of the difficulty of working under field conditions during the Carolina maneuvers, painted the two large regimental crests which enhance the front of regimental headquarters. Another of his works, a statuette of one of his fellow soldiers, won recognition for the regiment in the press. The unselfish use of his talent to add luster to the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry deserves the praise and thanks of the command.*

When he and his unit went overseas to join the fight he continued his artwork. His unit, the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry (also known as the Fighting Falcons) saw lots of fighting. Since creating large pieces of art while moving across Europe was not practical, he made drawings instead. His drawings would survive the war and he, years later, converted many of these into paintings.

His unit was involved in an important battle in World War II known as the "Miracle at Remagen". It was March of 1945 and the U.S. troops were moving across Europe, closing in on Germany. The Germans, in an effort to slow the U.S. advance, were ordered to destroy all the bridges that crossed the Rhine River. Crossing a river without a bridge is a logistical nightmare. The Rhine was the last major geographic obstacle in the U.S. troop's march to Berlin. As the 39th Infantry came up to the Rhine River, they were shocked when they noticed that a bridge was still standing. As they moved closer to the bridge, explosions were set off by the Germans. The bridge rocked and was damaged, but it still stood. The U.S. quickly sent men to cut any remaining demolition wires. The Germans fought valiantly to keep the U.S. from taking the bridge. They even attempted to bomb the bridge with artillery fire and bombs dropped from planes, but their efforts proved futile. The U.S. managed to retain the bridge and the land on both sides of it. With the vital path across the Rhine secured, the U.S. was able to move 8000 men and hundreds of vehicles across in the first 24 hours. After 7 days the damaged bridge collapsed, killing 28 Americans and wounding 93. While this was tragic, the path to Germany had been opened. With both sides of the Rhine in U.S. hands, they built pontoon bridges to move the remaining men and machines.

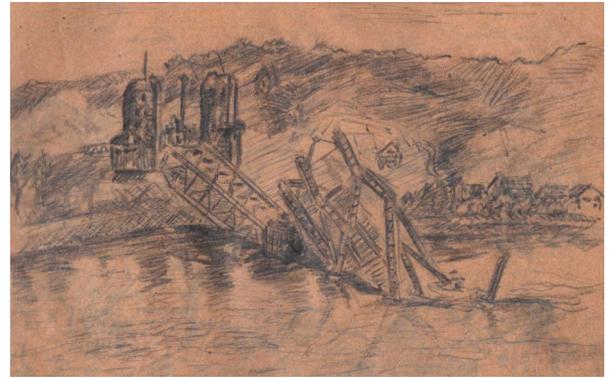
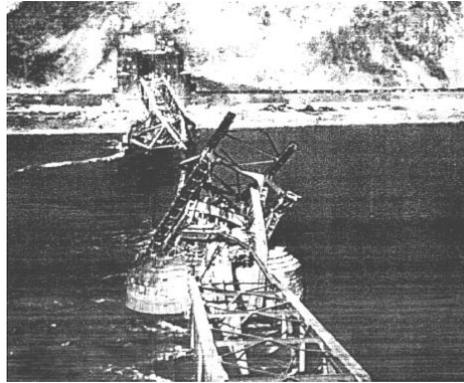
Always looking to capture the images of the war, Philip Orlando, on site, made two drawings of the Bridge at Remagen. One of the drawings was of the bridge while it was still intact. The other drawing was of the bridge after it collapsed into the river. These drawings can be seen on the opposite page.

Philip served his unit well throughout the war. He would be awarded a Bronze Star for the clerical role he performed. That citation appears elsewhere in this book.

After the war, Philip Orlando opened his own art studio in Plainfield, New Jersey. One of his earliest projects was the making of the Basilone Statue. It was the perfect project for him, as John Basilone was one of his childhood friends. The inspiring statue has stood proudly in Raritan since its unveiling in 1948. Each year, for the last 30 years, a ceremony is held at the statue after the Basilone Parade.

All of his life Philip Orlando would make a living as a sculptor / artist.

# Philip Orlando - Soldier and Artist



**Philip drew the two sketches on the right of the bridge at Remagen — one before it collapsed and one after it collapsed. He drew them right on location during the war.**



**Philip Orlando was a childhood friend of John Basilone.**

**He would build the Basilone Statue.**

**The photo on the left is of the unveiling in 1948.**

# The War Ends—A Time for Celebration and Reflection

For the United States, World War II ended in two stages. First, on May 8th, 1945, Germany surrendered. While there was a good reason to be joyful, any celebrations were very low-key or non-existent as the battle was not fully over — as Japan continued to fight on. The U.S. then turned all its military might on Japan. The brunt of that pounding was the U.S. bombing of mainland Japan using the new state-of-the-art B29s. By July and August the logistics of these B29 raids were amazingly efficient, as there was tremendous devastation to the Japanese cities with just a few scattered losses of U.S. planes and pilots. The Japanese people were on the verge of starvation, as sea mines had chocked off vital shipping lanes that had previously brought food to the population of Japan. But the Japanese still refused to surrender. The U.S. thought they would have to invade the homeland of Japan to finish them off. The casualty estimates of U.S. troops for this invasion were in the hundreds of thousands. Talk of this major invasion worried the U.S. homefront and Armed Forces.

One Raritan soldier, Al Gaburo, commented in a letter written home on how it would be difficult to get the Japanese to surrender:  
*“The nips are taking a terrible pounding by air and losing ground consistently. How much longer can they hold out? They know, as well as us, that victory for us is imminent. Yet they hate and fear shame.... I hope and pray that we might get some help from the other nations - especially England and Russia. Receiving help from them would help shorten the war and at the same time remove a portion of our burden. But it appears as though it is our war and that we alone must see it through. It will and shall be done.”*

Due to the brilliant work of top scientists, this final invasion would be avoided. These scientists, many who had fled Europe to avoid the Germans, created atomic bombs of previously unimaginable strength. The U.S. would drop two of these on Japan. First, on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945, and days later, on Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945. Each bomb flattened the center of the city, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. After the bomb's damage was assessed, their Emperor Hirohito finally decided that he did not want to see his people suffer any longer. He addressed them by radio, telling them the war was lost -- for the enemy had a “new and most cruel bomb.” It was time to surrender. Back in the U.S., rumors of a Japanese surrender had been floating around all day and many were anxiously awaiting the radio bulletin that would make it official. At 7 PM (Tuesday, August 14th, 1945) President Harry Truman announced that the Japanese had fully accepted the terms of surrender. THE WAR WAS OVER. The town of Raritan, who had lost 24 of their boys and sent over 900 into the fight, like all other towns, went to the streets to celebrate. And celebrate they did. A spontaneous parade was organized. People hugged, shouted, danced—it was an intense celebration that people would never forget. It would become known as VJ-Day --Victory over Japan.

Peter Vitelli, then 8 years old, recalls that evening. He was at home with his family at 8 Lincoln St. when they heard the church bells ringing. Soon a neighbor stopped by the house telling them that the war had ended. Overjoyed, everyone went house-to-house hugging their friends, family and neighbors. He noticed radios were on in every household, as people were listening for the details. Quickly, Raritan residents filled the local churches to give their thanks that it was all over.

John Pacifico's memories of that night were preserved in a letter he wrote to a friend overseas:  
*On the night of the fourteenth we had enough excitement to last for years. When it was officially announced that the Japanese had surrendered, Raritan with Somerville and Bound Brook, became an unbelievable riot-town. People were going wild, the streets were mobbed with cars and crowds, with every kind of noise you could think of, besides the continuous sounding of horns, whistles, guns, etc. Carmine, Russian, Angelo, Bucky, Chicky Laggini and I were in Johnny Aucellotte's car making a racket as we rode through the paper stormed towns. It was a night well worth remembering.*

Al Capetta, who was just 5 years old, remembers how unique the night was. A parade had seemingly been formed out of nowhere. Everyone congregated in and around Orlando's Tavern. And Al remembers that it was the only time that he ever saw his father (Al Sr.) drunk. The family had to carry his dad to bed. Al Sr. had special reason to live it up that night, for he had two brothers overseas that would now return home safely.

# VJ-Day Aug. 14th 1945, The Day the War Ended—The Announcement set off the most intense spontaneous celebration in U.S. History.



This gas station, which is decorated for VJ-Day, stood on the corner of Thompson St. & Rte 202. A shopping plaza with Stapleton's Restaurant is there today. If you look closely, you see the price of gas is just 19 cents per gallon. The station was owned by Ralph Curio. It was knocked down in the late 1950s.



## PEACE GETS WILD WELCOME

A sudden cacophony of joyful noise was loosed in this area at 7 p. m. Tuesday night. Local residents lost no time in joining in the national celebration of the Japanese surrender. The epochal week, beginning with the first atomic bombing of Japan and gaining momentum with the Russian declaration of war against the Nips, came to a triumphant conclusion with total victory.

Hardly had the news been flashed when the din of factory whistles, fire alarm systems, noisemakers and automobile horns got started. Parents, wives, sisters, sweethearts and friends of servicemen, free of anxiety for the first time in almost five years, joined in heartfelt thanksgiving. Residents, in a pitch of anxiety since the first word of Nip surrender last Friday, started to let off steam.

### GATHER IN CROWDS

Somerset St. was crowded with joyful men, women and children embracing their neighbors, spreading confetti and setting off firecrackers. Smaller groups gathered in Bradley and Finderns to discuss the glad news. The biggest traffic jam since the war resulted as cars lined up in impromptu parades. The death knell of gasoline rationing brought reckless expenditure of long-hoarded stamps and many stations were dry long before potential patrons wanted to go home. Pedestrians danced in the streets.

Most taverns respected the request of Commissioner Alfred Driscoll of the Alcoholic Beverage Control and closed early. The area was far from dry, however, as many residents brought out long cherished bottles marked Hirohito.

### BAND PLAYS

One highlight of Raritan's celebration was a parade with music furnished by La Frattalenza Society Band. Many persons fell into line and ended up at the Centennial Tavern where Tony Orlando had arranged a victory party.

Firecrackers, some of which may have been saved from pre-war St. Rocco celebrations, lent to the carnival air. This is St. Rocco's week and business on the grounds of St. Ann's Church was rushed. Servicemen home on leave celebrated the victory which to many will mean early discharge. One GI, however, mourned, "I keep thinking of my buddies who won't come back."

Church services drew a large attendance. Immediately following the announcement of the surrender the Sacrament was exposed in St. Bernard's Church. Holy hour services were conducted by the Rev. Cornelius McGonigle at 7:30 p. m. St. Ann's Church held similar services and the Rev. Amedeo Russo, rector, conducted Holy Hour Wednesday night at 7:30 with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The Sacrament was exposed Wednesday at St. Joseph's Church with the Rev. Joseph G. Olsovsky conducting similar services. The Slovak Lutheran Church also held services Wednesday night.

### TWO-DAY HOLIDAY

Many area workers enjoyed a two day holiday proclaimed by President Truman and Governor Edge. Workers were given the extra holiday to make up for the day they sacrificed V-E day. War plants are giving their workers a two-day holiday except for essential operations. Johns-Manville will be closed for two days as will the Bakelite and the Diehl plant in Finderne. Calco also granted its workers a two-day holiday. The Army depots at both South Somerville and Belle Mead also enjoy a two-day holiday.



**Joe Bernabe** (5 LaGrange Street) had heard of the celebration that took place in Raritan: *"My folks told me of the wild celebration that took place in town when the official announcement of the war's end was made known. It really must have been something from out of this world with the cheering and noise that filled the air."*



**Michael Musz** and his gang in France celebrated the old fashioned way: *"Many people went wild when the war ended and I think all the boys who fought this war feel the same way ... we have to enjoy peace as best we can. I got a good load on by drinking Champagne from France."*



**Al Gaburo** wrote a touching letter about what the end of the war meant. The highlights are: *"To us it meant that the horrors of war were a thing of the past. We received the news with a great deal of happiness. We celebrated by cheering and singing. Most of us went to the chapel and give thanks to the Lord. It meant that we would no longer have to trust our luck. It meant we would soon be returned to our loved ones ... From the reports that I get, I rather surmised that you boys had a hell of a good time upon hearing of Japan's surrender. Your letter to me was self-explanatory. I could readily see that you were one happy person ... I was happy to note that you made your promise good Tony. I well remember the day when you told me the very words that your place would be open to everyone when final victory came. I do admire you for your sincerity ... I could just picture the gang parading the streets of Raritan, drunker than hell. I'll bet they even brought their bottles along with them. Lucky Stiffs."*

## **Robert Krachun was a guard at the Nuremberg Trials. He appeared in a famous war photo & video footage.**

It was December, 1945, a few months after World War II had ended. John Pacifico was attending a movie at *The Raritan Playhouse* on Anderson Street in Raritan. One of the newsreels told of the trials of the Nazi leaders for the war crimes they had committed. The footage showed the Nazi war criminals in the courtroom at the Palace of Justice. Standing behind them were several guards. John Pacifico (and many of the other local people attending the movie) quickly recognized that one of the guards was Raritan's Robert Krachun of 86 First Avenue. The video (and photos) taken at the Nuremberg Trials would become famous images from World War II.

Robert Krachun served in the Army in World War II. His unit saw intense combat in Europe throughout the war. At the war's conclusion, he was assigned to guard duty at the trial for the Top-22 war criminals of Nazi Germany. These trials would come to be known as The Nuremberg Trials. Being tall, he was chosen to serve in the courtroom. Since the guards stood in an uncomfortable position, their shifts in the courtroom lasted just two hours. But fate had Robert Krachun on duty at the time the justices allowed the media to take their photos and video. The photographs of the Nazi criminals with Robert in the background are found today in many history books as well as on the internet.

After the newsreel was seen stateside, the local paper *The Raritan Valley News* published the photo of Robert Krachun with Nazis Hermann Goring and Rudolph Hess on the front page. Several articles also appeared in local papers.

One article had a quote from Robert which was taken from a letter he had written home. It said his experience will give him something to tell his grandchildren. However, years later, he was hesitant to tell of his part in history. Like most of the greatest generation, he felt no need to boast of his war record. Robert's son Jeff (who now owns the *Agway* in Raritan) found out about his father's appearance in the famous Nuremberg images only when he was in his twenties. His dad was watching a World War II special on TV and footage of the Nuremberg Trial was shown. Robert said to his son Jeff, there I am -- right behind Hermann Goring. Jeff sat in disbelief, had his dad lost it — gone crazy in some illusion? But indeed Raritan's Robert Krachun had been there, standing behind some of the most evil men the world has ever known.

Robert has said that the Nazis on trial were arrogant and showed no remorse for the atrocities they had committed. Especially arrogant was Hermann Goring, who often stood up and yelled out stinging comments in the courtroom. The chief prosecutor of the trial was U.S. Justice Robert Jackson. As witness to the proceedings, Robert Krachun said that Jackson did an excellent job as he took no crap from the Nazis.

The guard duty for these Nazi war criminals mostly included watching them outside the courtroom. Early in the trial, one Nazi managed to commit suicide by hanging himself in his cell. The authorities wanted these men brought to justice. So to prevent further suicides, the guards constantly watched the prisoners in their cells through a small window. Even while the Nazis slept, the guards watched.

The entire trial lasted for almost a year. Toward the end of the trial, Robert Krachun's term of duty was up, thus he was sent home. He recalled hearing the verdicts for the defendants announced over the radio. Eleven were sentenced to death. Several were given life imprisonment. Several others had prison sentences ranging from 10–20 years. Three were surprisingly acquitted. When asked if he agreed with the three Nazis being acquitted, he said "*They were all guilty and deserved to be hanged.*"

# Robert Krachun guarded Hermann Goring at the Nuremberg Trials.



**Robert Krachun**  
86 First Ave.



**Fatso Gives Mouthpiece His Orders**

Squirming Hermann Goering, star performer of the Nuremberg war crimes trial, peers worriedly through hatch in prisoners' enclosure screen in Palace of Justice as interrogators with his lawyer, Dr. Otto Stahmer. Guy at left is Tank MP, seeing to it that there is no runaway going on. They are plotting next day's maneuver.

**Robert Krachun can be seen through the screen next to Hermann Goring.**

## Raritan Soldier Guard In Neurnberg Court

Raritan—Pfc. Robert A. Krachun, U. S. Army, son of Mrs. Elizabeth Krachun, 86 First Ave., is assigned as a guard in the court-room at Neurnberg, Germany, where the Nazi leaders are on trial as war criminals.

He has been in service since July 1, 1944, and was with the First Infantry Division in Belgium, Germany and Czechoslovakia.



**Hermann Goring**

**Rudolph Hess**

**Robert Krachun**

**About the Nazi on trial, Krachun said:**  
*"They were all guilty and deserved to be hanged."*

## **The Western Union Telegram Delivers the Tragic News**

Peter Vitelli still remembers one incident on the World War II homefront like it was yesterday. It was the summer of 1944. He and his brother Robert, along with Monte Gibson, and Clem Valko were playing on a small empty lot on the corner of Lincoln Street and Lagrange Street. They noticed the telegraph delivery boy, with the standard company uniform, go by on his bicycle. (The Western Union Office was in Somerville at 10 Division Street.) The delivery boy was Nap Torpey, who had just graduated from Somerville High School. Nap parked his bike in front of 22 Lagrange Street and walked up to the door of the Harcarik house. He knocked on the door—when the mom answered he gave her the telegram. Moments later, Peter Vitelli and the rest of the kids heard the mom screaming – as she had just been informed that her son Ed was “Missing in Action”. He would later be declared dead. All of the kids then ran home to tell their parents what had happened. Very soon Police Chief Lorenzo Rossi and members of the Raritan rescue squad went to the Harcarik house to give support.

Decades later, Peter Vitelli had the opportunity to talk with Nap Torpey about his days as a telegram delivery boy. Nap said that the job of delivering telegrams that contained tragic news was difficult. After being in the job for several months, it had taken a tremendous toll on him. His parents noticed the effect that it had on him, and after some discussion with them, he quit the job.

## **Walter Jacobs—Raritan’s First Death in the War**

In the first 18 months of the war, Raritan was fortunate that none of their boys were killed. There had been many battles at places like Pearl Harbor, Midway, and Guadalcanal. The local newspapers told of the heroic actions of the Raritan soldiers and sailors who had participated and how they always managed to cheat death. The reality that this small town would lose some of their boys hit home in July of 1943, when the first Raritan war death was reported. Raritan’s first GI to die for his country was Walter Jacobs. The first of many telegrams beginning “REGRET TO INFORM YOU” would be sent to Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Jacobs at 2 Railroad Ave.

He was just 22 years old. Walter had been in the service for one year. On July 3rd, 1943, he was killed in a plane crash while training at an Air Force base in Needles, California. Non-combat deaths were common in the war, as the men were often training with dangerous equipment. In Walter Jacob’s case, they were flying new “state of the art” planes -- the advanced technology of the day, but the planes had not been fully tested. The bugs had not been worked out of the hardware and proper safety procedures had not yet evolved. It was standard military knowledge that a plane in combat with a poorly trained and inexperienced crew was no match against an experienced air crew. That was a waste of both precious lives and an expensive plane. So to prepare for battle, there was extensive training stateside. As a result, there were many accidents. Over one thousand Americans would be killed in Air Force training during World War II.

During World War II, both the U.S. military and the residents of Raritan made sure to pay proper tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The tributes for Walter Jacobs served as an example of this. When his body was returned to Raritan for burial, the military assigned a sergeant to accompany the body. Raritan held several services on Monday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943. The first was in the morning at the Jacobs home. Camp Kilmer (in Piscataway) sent 16 military men to this service. The second service was at St. Bernard’s Church on Somerset Street. It was led by Reverend Cornelius McGonigle. The next ceremony was before the burial at St. Bernard’s Cemetery. There the local Raritan Valley American Legion Post conducted the committal services. A bugler, provided by Camp Kilmer, sounded taps. Later in the evening, back at the Jacob’s house, the Sante Moretti Post conducted services where the commander of the legion, Wilfred Davis, read a special legion ritual. There, Mrs. Isabelle Gaburo sang “Sleep, Soldier Boy”.

# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

**Rocco DeMelio 64 Thompson St. & Rocco Scarponi 39 Frelinghuysen Ave.**



## Two Raritan Men Are Missing From Sunken Troopship

Corp. Rocco DeMelio,  
Corp. Rocco Scarponi,  
Both 29, Were Bound  
Overseas with AAF

RARITAN—Two Raritan soldiers, both attached to the Army Air Forces, have been missing since April 20 in the Mediterranean area, according to official advice from the War Department to their families. They are:

Corporal Rocco F. DeMelio, 29, son of Mr. and Mrs. Angelo DeMello, 64 Thompson street.

Corporal Rocco Scarponi, 29, son of Mrs. Mildred Scarponi and the late Daniel Scarponi, 39 Frelinghuysen avenue.

Neither family had been advised of the arrival of its son on foreign soil. Official notices that the soldiers were casualties came on Sunday and it was believed that both might have been aboard the transport announced on Monday as having recently been lost with a toll of 498. A letter received from the Adjutant-General's office by each family yesterday confirmed the fear that they were aboard the ship, but stated the men are still not considered "lost."

The last letters received from both were written in this country, one from Corporal DeMelio being received on April 1 and that of Corporal Scarponi on April 2.

## DeMello an Aerial Gunner

Corporal DeMello, an aerial gunner in the Air Forces, had been in service since May, 1942. He attended the local schools and at the time of his enlistment was employed by the C. P. Hoagland Printing Company, Somerville.

He has two brothers in service. They are Private 1c Joseph DeMello of the Marine Corps and Private Anthony DeMello, an interpreter with the Army in Sardinia.

## Scarponi in Reconnaissance

Corporal Scarponi served with a reconnaissance squadron. His wife is the former Miss Jean Zelano of 112 First avenue. He attended local schools and Somerville High School and was employed in the Manville plant of Johns-Manville Corporation before entering service in April, 1942. He trained at Lake Charles, La., and Will Rogers Field, Okla. A brother, Private 1c Thomas Scarponi, is serving with the Army Medical Corps in Australia.

**Dominic Baldini**  
25 First Ave.



Pfc. Dominic Baldini, 23, the second Raritan soldier to be killed in the Salerno encounter. A native of Montemarcano, Italy, he came to the United States in 1931. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Caesar Baldini, he entered service Feb. 18, 1942, with Pvt. De Lorenzo and met death exactly two weeks later, Sept. 23, 1943, than his buddy.

**Philip De Lorenzo**  
37 Anderson St.



## Raritan Private Fatally Wounded In Sicilian Action

Philip De Lorenzo Dies  
September 9; Overseas  
Five Months in Infantry

RARITAN—Mr. and Mrs. John DeLorenzo of 37 Anderson street learned Sunday that their son, Private 1c Philip DeLorenzo, 25, had been fatally wounded in action. He died September 9 in North Africa. It is believed that he was a casualty in the fighting in Sicily.

Private DeLorenzo was one of four children. He has been in the Army since February, 1942, and was in the Infantry. He trained at Camp Blanding, Fla., and at Camp Edwards, Mass. Last March he was home on a short furlough and called for North Africa in April.

## Brother Now in Italy

A brother, Private 1c Gaspar DeLorenzo, has been in overseas service for 18 months. He is believed to be somewhere in Italy now. He tried many times to meet his brother in Africa, his parents said, but "was always one step ahead of Philip," going into Sicily and Italy with the first troops. He is in the Coast Artillery.

Private DeLorenzo leaves also a brother, Jack, who will soon be 18 and is a high school student, and a sister, Louise, attending Raritan schools.

# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

## Francis Harcar - 41 La Grange St.



Pfc. Francis J. Harcar, 28, the first local boy to die on foreign soil in World War 2. He died Aug. 6, 1943, of a gunshot wound in the North African area. He volunteered for service May 16, 1942, and fought in the Tunisian campaign. The hero is the son of Joseph Harcar of La Grange St.

### Private 1c Francis Harcar of Raritan Killed in Action, Father Is Informed

RARITAN—A telegram received from the War Department has informed Joseph Harcar of 41 LaGrange street that his son, Private 1c Francis Harcar, was killed in action August 6. He died of his wounds in North Africa. It is believed that he took part in the Sicilian campaign and was taken by plane back to a hospital.

Private Harcar was 28 and went overseas last April. He trained at Camp Blanding, Fla., Camp Edwards, Mass., and in North Carolina.

On August 1, five days before he died, the soldier wrote to his parents that he was moving up to the front. That was the last word heard from him. He had been in the Tunisian campaign previously.

Private Harcar worked at the Johns-Manville Corporation plant before entering the service May 16, 1942. He attended St. Joseph's School here. His last visit home was at Easter. He was married to the former Miss Augusta Dutka of New Brunswick, who is now a hospital patient. Two other sons of the Harcars are in service, 21-year-old John being stationed at Fort Worth, Tex., and Joseph, 30, at Camp Bowie, Tex. A fourth son, Peter, passed his Selective Service physical examination Tuesday and probably will be called within a few weeks.



FRANCIS HARCAR

## Ed Harcarik - 22 La Grange St.

RARITAN—Seaman 1c Edward R. Harcarik, U. S. Navy, is reported missing in action in a Navy Department telegram received Tuesday by his parents, former Commissioner and Mrs. Andrew Harcarik of 22 LaGrange street. The telegram did not state in which theatre of war he was serving.

Seaman Harcarik, 20, attended St. Joseph's Parochial School and Somerville High School. He was employed in the Manville plant of Johns-Manville. When he entered service in April, 1943, he was home on leave early this year and at that time had seen service in the African and Asiatic campaigns and in the American theater. He was assigned as a gunner aboard a merchant ship. His last letter to his family was dated April 9. Besides his parents, he has one sister, Miss Madeline M. Harcarik, at home. He has a brother, John, radio-man in the Navy, who took part in the invasion of Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica.

### Seaman Harcarik Reported Missing



### Son's Death Told On Victory Day

In the midst of the general rejoicing over the Japanese surrender, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Harcarik of 22 La Grange St. received word Tuesday that their son, S 1-c Edward Harcarik, lost his life July 25, 1944. The sailor was a gunner aboard a merchant ship enroute from Capetown, South Africa, to Bahati, Brazil. His vessel was torpedoed by a submarine and sent out an SOS.

The Harcariks were informed by the Navy on Aug. 29, 1944, that their son was missing. An extensive search was made by the Navy but no survivors were found. Edward is now listed officially as dead.

The 21-year-old sailor, a graduate of St. Joseph's School and

### SON'S DEATH TOLD

(Continued from Page One)

Somerville High, went into service May 3, 1943. He took boot at Newport, R. I., and then went to Little Creek, Va., for a six-week gunnery course after which he was assigned to a merchant ship. After one trip to South America and Africa, he returned home in February, 1944, for a 10-day leave. Late in May of that year his family received a letter dated Apr. 9 saying "it would be a long time before he came home."

Three of his brothers also wear uniform. John and Andrew also chose the Navy and Alfred is a Marine. Edward is survived also by his sister, Madeline. A Memorial Mass will be held Aug. 25 in St. Joseph's Church.

## Frank Passarelo - 52 Second Ave.

### Pfc. Passarelo



Pfc. Frank Passarelo, 33, who died of wounds in the Pacific area Apr. 19. The local soldier served with the 77th Infantry Division and was thought to be on Ijima at that time. Son of Mrs. Maria Russo of 52 Second Ave., he had entered service in March.

### Wounds Suffered On Okinawa Fatal To Raritan Soldier

Private 1c Passarella Dead, Mother Advised; Brother in Regiment

RARITAN—Word of another local casualty on Okinawa arrived here Saturday when Mrs. Maria Russo was notified by the War Department of the death of her son, Private 1c Frank J. Passarella, whose home is at 52 Second avenue. The message said he died of wounds received in action April 18. He was a member of the 306th Regiment, 77th Infantry Division.

Passarella had been overseas about 14 months and was a veteran of three major engagements against the Japs. He received the Combat Infantryman's Badge on Guam. He had been in service since January, 1942.

A brother, Corporal Paul Passarella, is a member of a cannon company in the same regiment overseas. The soldier brothers were often together, according to letters home, and had several golfing dates in Hawaii. Both learned to golf at Raritan Valley Country Club, where they started as caddies and practiced until both could go around the course in the low 80's.

In addition to his mother, Private Passarella is survived by a sister, Mrs. Joseph Russo, Bartine street, Somerville; a half-sister, Miss Mary Russo, at home; three brothers, Caesar Passarella, 14 Somerset street; Nicholas Passarella, Washington, N. J., and Angelo Passarella, Miami, Fla., now visiting his mother here.

A military mass in memory of the soldier will be held at 8:30 a. m. Saturday in St. Ann's Church here.



# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

## Abraham Granetz

64 E. Somerset St.

### Lieut. Granetz Dies At 34

First Lieut. Abram Granetz, who died early Sunday morning in Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D. C., was buried Monday with full military honors. He was 34 and had been a medical patient for months.



Lieutenant Granetz was commissioned in the Army in 1918. He served as school dentist for Raritan and Bridgewater Township from September, 1940 until going into the Army. The late officer was an accomplished violinist and was a member of the New Jersey All-State Orchestra for several years while in high school and played at recitals throughout the State. He is the second young officer from Raritan to die in World War 2. Lieut. John Gentile of Thompson St. was killed last month in New Guinea in a plane crash. After joining the Army as a private he went to Ft. Dix and then to Camp Gary, Ill., where he received his commission as a First Lieutenant. He then went to Camp Wheeler, Va. in the 8th Central Postal Directory, where he was taken ill. He is survived by his parents, two sisters, Mrs. Meyer Jackson of Bound Brook and Mrs. Reuben Lee of New York City; four brothers, Dr. Solomon Granetz of New York City, Eruben, Nathan and Walter, Standish, Mass., last June as he

was about to go overseas aboard a hospital ship. A detachment of soldiers from Camp Wheeler housed a guard of honor at Congregation Anshe Chesed in Somerville and at the grave in Gateville Cemetery. Officers from the Quartermaster Sub-Depot at South Somerville attended services at his late home, 64 E. Somerset St. He joined the Army as a private on June 13, 1918, and was taken ill at Camp Miles Standish, Mass., last June as he

born in Russian C... attended local schools and Somerville High. He was a high honor student at St. E. S. and won a scholarship to Rutgers. He was a pre-medical student at Rutgers and was graduated with high honors with the class of 1933. He then did graduate work at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, and was graduated as a dentist. He practiced dentistry in a Newark hospital and opened his office at 41 W. Main St. Somerville in 1937.

## Walter Jacobs

2 Railroad Ave.

### Raritan Sergeant Killed Instantly In Plane Crash

Walter Jacobs in Army Less Than Year, Meets Death at Needles, Cal.

RARITAN — Staff Sergeant Walter Jacobs of the Army Air Forces was killed instantly last Saturday in an airplane crash at Needles, Calif., according to official word received by his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Jacobs of 2 Anderson street. Details of the accident have not been released by the Army. The body is being shipped to Bourke's Funeral Home here, where funeral arrangements will be made.

Sergeant Jacobs was 22 and a former member of Company B, 114th Regiment, New Jersey National Guard. He had been in federal service since last September. Before entering the Army he was a maintenance man for the Central Railroad. He had been previously stationed at Salt Lake City, Utah.

Surviving, besides his parents, are three brothers, Private Frank Jacobs, U. S. Army, in Hawaii, a veteran of the attack on Pearl Harbor; John J. Jacobs of Dunellen; Stephen Jacobs of Belleville, N. Y.; three sisters, Mrs. Pauline Bratek of Manville, Mrs. Joan Sanders of Raritan and Miss Josephine Jacobs, at home.

## Reverend Rowland Koskamp

62 E. Somerset St.



His story is found elsewhere in this book

## Carmine Crugnale

19 N. Gaston Ave.



### Sailor from Raritan Dies In Florida Naval Hospital

RARITAN — Seaman 2c Carmine Thomas Crugnale, U. S. Navy, 18, died Sunday in the Naval Hospital at Pensacola, Fla., from acute nephritis. He was a son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Crugnale, 25 Gaston avenue, and a member of St. Ann's Church. He had been in service since April. Besides his parents, he leaves two sisters, Mrs. Minnie Cameron of New Brunswick and Miss Alma Crugnale, at home, and two brothers, Frederick and Joseph Crugnale, both at home.

Funeral services will be held Saturday morning at 9:30 o'clock from the Gaston avenue residence and at 10 o'clock, a Solemn High Mass will be celebrated at St. Ann's Church. Interment will be in St. Bernard's Cemetery, with arrangements in charge of Hannon's Funeral Home.

## John Basilone

113 First Ave.

### Sergeant John Basilone, Hero Of Marines, Killed on Iwo Jima

Platoon Sergeant John Basilone, Raritan's hero of the U. S. Marine Corps, was killed in action by the Japs on Iwo Jima February 19, according to word released at 10 o'clock this morning by 4th Marine Division headquarters.

Holder of the highest honor this nation can bestow on its fighting sons, the Congressional Medal of Honor, Basilone became the nation's No. 1 war hero in June of 1943 when he became the only living enlisted Marine to receive the decoration.

In the first assault troops to hit Iwo, Sergeant Basilone and several of his platoon were slain by Jap artillery fire, according to the Marine Corps. He was 27 years old.

Wearied of War Bond tours and rallies in his honor after he returned to the U. S., and of an assignment as a gunnery instructor, Sergeant Basilone asked early last year that he be allowed to return to the fighting front with his old division. His request was granted.

Reporters inadvertently broke the tragic news to Mrs. Theodora Basilone, the mother, and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Theresa Bengivenga, this morning after release of the news. A Western Union messenger delivered the War Department telegram to Salvatore Basilone, the father, who is employed at the Holcombe & Holcombe store. He telephoned home while the reporters were talking with Mrs. Basilone. She became hysterical. Other members of the family were called.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was conferred on Sergeant Basilone after he killed 38 Japs on Guadalcanal in three days of fighting without rest or food. He was credited with vitally contributing to the annihilation of an entire Japanese regiment.

In July, 1943, Basilone came back to his home town to be accorded a hero's welcome in one of the greatest demonstrations ever staged in Somerset County. He was presented with a gift of \$5,000 in War Bonds by his fellow townsmen.

Last year, before returning overseas, Sergeant Basilone married the former Angelo Riegl, a sergeant in the Marine Corps stationed in California. Surviving, besides his parents and wife are four sisters: Mrs. Catherine Marino, Mary Basilone and Dolores Basilone of Raritan, and Mrs. Phyllis Brownson of Oklahoma; and five brothers: Angelo Basilone, Carlo Basilone and Donald Basilone of Raritan; Private 1c Alphonse Basilone, with the Third Army in Germany; and Marine Corporal George Basilone, also fighting on Iwo Jima.



# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

## Frank Esposito - 7 Thompson St.



### Frank P. Esposito Dies in Explosion

RARITAN—Private 1c Frank P. Esposito, U. S. Army, was killed in a recent explosion in the Hawaiian area, according to a telegram from the War Department received Saturday by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James V. Esposito of 7 Thompson street.

Private Esposito entered service in March, 1942, and was assigned to the Infantry. He attended Raritan schools and was employed at Calco Chemical Division plant and by Nicholas Tozzi, local ice and fuel dealer. His wife is the former Helen Kovac of this place. She is at his parents' home with her daughter, Frances, aged four and a half months.

James Esposito, a brother, is with the AAF in Arizona.



Wedding Photo

## Joseph Spatt - 52 Gaston Ave.



### Raritan Soldier Killed in Italy

RARITAN—Private Joseph Spatt, previously reported missing in action in Italy since September 25, is now listed as dead, according to a War Department message his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Spatt of 52 Gaston avenue, have received.

Serving with the 350th Infantry Division in Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army, Private Spatt had entered Rome on June 2, the day of his 19th birthday. He was inducted September 9, 1943, and after Infantry training at Fort McClellan, Ala., he went overseas February 17.

A brother, George Spatt, torpedoman 1c in the Navy, has been in New Guinea since August of last year. Both brothers attended Somerville High School.



## Michael Mazepa - 70 (#40 in 1943) La Grange St.



### Raritan Marine Listed as Missing

RARITAN—Mr. and Mrs. Kasmer Mazepa of 48 LaGrange street have been notified by the Navy Department that Mr. Mazepa's brother, Corporal Michael Mazepa, 19, of the Marine Corps, has been reported missing in action. Corporal Mazepa, who is a top turret gunner on a B-24 Liberator Bomber, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Mazepa of Iselin. He lived in Raritan.

A letter followed the telegram, the Mazepas report, stating that on May 5 the Liberator on which Mazepa is a crew member failed to return from a mission in the Southwest Pacific.

The missing airman has been in service two years, and went overseas six months ago.

CLASS OF SERVICE	WESTERN UNION	1201	SYMBOLS
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The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.			
NBA76 51 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC MAY 16 611P			
CASPER MAZEPA=			
48 LAGRANGE ST RARITAN NJER=			
AN OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF PRESUMPTIVE DEATH AS OF 6 MAY 1945 HAS BEEN MADE BY NAVY DEPARTMENT IN THE CASE OF YOUR BROTHER CORPORAL MICHAEL F MAZEPA USMC WHO HAS BEEN CARRIED ON THE RECORDS OF HIS OFFICE AS MISSING IN ACTION SINCE 5 MAY 1944. PLEASE ACCEPT MY HEARTFELT SYMPATHY=			
A VANDEGRIFT GENERAL USMC COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE			

# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

## Jerry Ottaviana - 19 Anderson St.



Pfc. Jerry L. Ottaviana of 19 Anderson St., who died of wounds May 5 on Negros Islands in the Philippines. Son of Mrs. Mary Ottaviana of Summit St., Somerville, he had served with the Americal Infantry Division. His widow is the former Mary Torlish. The 28-year old soldier had gone into uniform Sept. 9, 1943, and went overseas the following March.

### Infantry Private Dies of Wounds

RARITAN—Private 1c. Jerry L. Ottaviano, U. S. Army, died of wounds suffered on Negros Island in the Philippines on May 6, his wife, Mrs. Mary T. Ottaviano of 19 Anderson street, has been notified by the War Department. The soldier, an infantryman, was the son of Mrs. Mary Angelo Ottaviano, 212 West Summit street, Somerville, and the late John Ottaviano.

The 27-year-old private was previously wounded in the Philippines about two months ago. He is in service since September, 1943. Besides his mother and widow, he leaves one brother, Andrew Ottaviano of Dunellen, and six sisters, the Misses Katherine, Antoinette, Lucy, Elizabeth, Helen and Virginia Ottaviano, all of Somerville.

## Alfonse Matteis - 20 First Ave.



S-Sgt. Alfonse Matteis, 22, first local casualty on Okinawa. The Marine son of Mr. and Mrs. James Matteis, Sr., 20 First Ave., was killed Apr. 15.

### Marine Sergeant Killed on Okinawa

RARITAN—Staff Sergeant Alfonse C. Matteis, 22, U. S. Marine Corps, was killed in action on Okinawa April 15, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Matteis Sr., 20 First avenue, were informed Thursday by the Navy Department. The sergeant was serving with the 414th Squadron and had charge of repair work on Corsairs.

Sergeant Matteis entered the service August, 1942, taking his preliminary training at Cherry Point, N. C. Before enlisting, he was employed by the Calco Chemical Division plant, Bound Brook.

A brother, Staff Sergeant Rocco Matteis, is with the Army Air Forces in Texas. He returned to the States in January after completing 35 missions in the European theater. He holds the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, a Presidential Unit Citation and the Good Conduct Medal.

Also surviving are two sisters, Mrs. Caper Fidacaro of Bound Brook and Miss Theresa Matteis, at home, and two other brothers, Michael Matteis of Dunellen and Joseph Matteis Jr. of Somerville.

## Peter Obzansky - 6 Colfax St.



### Illness Is Fatal For Raritan Man In New Guinea

Peter Obzansky Dies in Army Base Hospital, Overseas 18 Months

RARITAN—Mr. and Mrs. Peter Obzansky of 4 Colfax street were informed by telegram from the War Department last Thursday night that their son, Corporal Peter Obzansky Jr., died July 10 in an Army hospital in New Guinea after an illness of several weeks.

That the soldier was ill was known to his family, for in his last letter home, written June 13, Corporal Obzansky said that he was entering a hospital for treatment for a nervous condition. He was 26 and had been overseas with the Army Medical Corps since February, 1942.

Soon after the soldier's letter, his family received a War Department telegram reporting he was seriously ill. This was followed in a week by a letter from the department reporting an improvement in his condition.

### Buddy Sends Personal Effects

On July 11, the family received several souvenirs belonging to their son in addition to his watch and wallet, from a buddy, First Sergeant Richard M. Ruhl of Lockhaven, Pa.

Corporal Obzansky entered service in March, 1941. Prior to that time he had been a member of Company F, 114th Regiment, National Guard of New Jersey, in Somerville. He attended St. Joseph's Parochial School here and had been employed in the Calco Chemical Division plant.

His brother, Paul Obzansky, served three months in the Navy in 1942, then received a medical discharge. Surviving besides his parents and this brother is one sister, Miss Mary Obzansky, at home.

### Dead Soldier's Parents Get MacArthur Letter

RARITAN — General Douglas MacArthur and Chaplain George M. Schumacker have sent letters of condolence to Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Obzanski, 6 Colfax street, in the death of their son, Corporal Peter Obzanski, U. S. Army Medical Corps, who died in New Guinea July 10 after hospitalization for a nervous condition.

General MacArthur told the parents, "Your consolation may be that he died in the uniform of our beloved country, and served in a cause from which a better world for all will come." Chaplain Schumacker said that Corporal Obzanski was buried with full military honors, befitting a man who gave his life for the country. He also said the grave is registered and marked and will be looked after in every way to preserve its identity.

# Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice

## Julius Dominici - 11 La Grange St.

### Raritan Infantryman On Front Lines in France

RARITAN—Word that he is with one of the spearhead Infantry divisions pushing through France from the Normandy beach has been received here from Private 1c Julius Dominici of 11 La Grange street. He went overseas in May.

Writing "on the front-line in France from my foxhole dugout with rain and artillery shells cutting the air and the occasional thump of a Nazi mortar that is trying to silence our machine guns," Private Dominici reports that the French patriots are "swell people and their cider is good, too."

### Second Wire Telling Soldier's Death Ends Hopes Held in First Telegram

RARITAN — A second telegram containing news of the death of their son in action followed a War Department message of a few days earlier that he was reported missing to the parents of Private 1c Julius Dominici, 203 U. S. Army, of 11 La Grange street. The second telegram came to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Dominici Sunday night, the soldier was killed in France August 3.

Dominici was a graduate of Somerville High School and was employed at the Calco Chemical Division at the time of his induction in May, 1943. He had been overseas since May, 1944.

Shortly before he was reported missing, Dominici's parents received a letter from him, which said that he was writing "on the front line in France from my foxhole dugout, with rain and artillery shells cutting the air and the occasional thump of a Nazi mortar that is trying to silence our machine guns."

A Memorial Mass for Private Dominici will be celebrated by the Rev. Amedeo Russo Saturday morning in St. Ann's Church. Members of local veterans' organizations will attend with their colors.



Pfc. Julius D. Dominici of 11 La Grange St., first local man to lose his life in the invasion of France. He was killed in action Infantry division. Son of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Dominici, he went into uniform May 4, 1943.

## John Gentile - 81 Thompson St.



### Lieut. Gentile Is Killed

RARITAN—Second Lieutenant John J. Gentile, AAF, son of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Gentile of 81 Thompson street, died December 29 in the North Atlantic area, the War Department notified his parents Tuesday night. Circumstances of his death were not disclosed but the office of the Adjutant-General promised further details would follow.

Announcement was made today by Army officials that the Raritan officer was one of 10 soldiers killed in the crash of a B-17 "somewhere outside of the United States."

Lieutenant Gentile, 24, was the husband of the former Ruth Sisser, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Sisser of Codrington place, Somerville. They were married August 9 in New York City and made their home at Nashville, Tenn., where the lieutenant was based with the Army Air Forces Transport Command. He was assigned as a B-17 navigator to ferry flights over the Southern Atlantic route to Africa and Mediterranean bases.

A month ago, Lieutenant Gentile was transferred to Wilmington, Del., and assigned to Ferry Command flights to England by way of Canada. He visited his wife here December 20. On December 29, the day of his death, he wrote to his parents that he had been grounded for several days at Newfoundland by bad weather.

A spokesman for the Gentile family said last night that a memorial High Mass would be celebrated tomorrow at 8:30 a. m. at St. Ann's Church by the pastor, the Rev. Amedeo Russo, the Rev. Cornelius P. McGonigle of St. Bernard's Church and the Rev. Joseph Olsovsky of St. Joseph's Church.

Details from the Sante Moretti Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and from Raritan Valley Post, American Legion, will attend the services.

Lieutenant Gentile entered the (Please turn to page eight)

Army in February, 1942, and graduated the following July from the Chausse Field, Ill., school for mechanics of the Army Air Forces. He was appointed an aviation cadet in September, 1942, and graduated last April from the Coral Gables, Fla., AAF school for navigators. He was assigned to duty at the Rosecrans Field, St. Joseph, Mo.

At Somerville High School, where he graduated in 1938, he was an outstanding athlete as captain of the football team and member of the basketball and wrestling teams. He was employed by the Calco Chemical Division before entering service.

Besides his wife and parents, Lieutenant Gentile leaves three sisters, Miss Marie Gentile, at home; Mrs. Anna Cirello and Mrs. Rose Amoroso, also of Raritan, and a brother, Private 1c Michael Gentile of the Army Infantry, stationed in Absecon.

Pilot of the crashed bomber was First Lieutenant Bruce E. Ryan of New York, formerly of Cranford.

## Alfred Zanoni - 62 W Somerset St.

### Lieut. A. L. Zanoni Reported Missing Since March 20

#### Parents Believe Combat Veteran Lost While Passenger in Transport

RARITAN—Mr. and Mrs. Louis Zanoni of 62 West Somerset street last Thursday received War Department notification that their son, Second Lieutenant Alfred L. Zanoni of the Army Air Forces, has been missing since March 20 in the Southwest Pacific. He is first pilot of a B-25 Mitchell medium bomber.

Letters to his parents recently described a 30-day rest period spent in New Zealand, "where the folks are very friendly to us Americans and where we enjoyed sleeping on soft mattresses with sheets." Lieutenant Zanoni's family believes he was returning from this leave aboard a transport plane when he was reported missing.

Lieutenant Zanoni's squadron was based on the Solomons and had participated in repeated bombing forays against Rabaul and in other actions. His most successful mission was in January when his squadron surprised the Japs on the ground and destroyed 60 planes.

On the trip, Zanoni wrote home, his ship dropped out of formation to escort a crippled Mitchell back to the base. A Japanese anti-aircraft shell tore through the bomb bay of his plane and twisted the bomb racks but by a miracle failed to set off the explosives carried there. The crew did not know the shell had hit them until they landed and the plane was inspected.

On another mission, the pilot discovered after he had landed that one wing was almost torn loose from the fuselage and was ready to drop off.

Lieutenant Zanoni attended Raritan schools and Peddie Institute. He graduated in 1942 from Lehigh University where he majored in engineering and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Regular Army. He was called to active duty with the infantry in May of the same year and transferred to the air corps in July. He won his wings at Ellington Field, Tex., in February, 1943, and went overseas after taking operations training at Greenville, S. C.

### Lt. Zanoni



First Lt. Alfred Zanoni, 25, who died in the South Pacific area Mar. 20, 1944. He served as a pilot on sustained combat operational missions for which he won the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster. His parents are Mr. and Mrs. Louis Zanoni of 62 W. Somerset St. Lt. Zanoni went into service in June, 1942, and went overseas in Sept., 1943.

### Lieutenant Zanoni Reported Dead

RARITAN — First Lieutenant Alfred Zanoni, AAF, of 62 West Somerset street, was reported by the War Department yesterday to have died March 30 in the South Pacific area. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Zanoni, he had originally been reported missing in a Navy transport plane while returning to his Solomons Islands base after spending a 30-day rest leave in New Zealand.

Lieutenant Zanoni was co-pilot on a B-25 Mitchell medium bomber. He had participated in bombing raids of Rabaul and in other missions, and in one foray alone in January his squadron was credited with destroying 60 Jap planes on the ground in a surprise attack. His family has learned from unofficial sources that he had been awarded the Air Medal.

(An earlier story reporting Zanoni's promotion from second to first lieutenant will be found on page 7 of today's issue.)

# Silver Star Citations

The Silver Star is awarded for heroic actions in combat only. Its standard is much higher than the Bronze Star, thus less were awarded. Various records show that there were three Silver Star recipients who came from Raritan. For two of these the citation is known and a photo of the recipient is available, but for the third, we have very little information. Raritan's Silver Star recipients that we have information for are: Robert Yuhas who lived at 50 Thompson Street and Joseph Le Flem of 22 Vones Lane.

The other Silver Star recipient from Raritan is Chester Gulick. The record stating that he was awarded the Silver Star can be found just once, in a very small article in a 1945 newspaper which contained no photo or citation. The town he lived in is even a bit questionable as in the article it says he lived at 51 N. Cornell Boulevard, "Raritan". That address, which is right on the border of Raritan – Somerville, is today part of Somerville. But in 1945, it was part of Raritan.



**Robert Yuhas**  
Silver Star Recipient  
50 Thompson Street

*Private Robert A. Yuhas has been awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action against the enemy on Nov 5, 1944, in the vicinity of Metz, France. With his contact patrol receiving disastrous mortar and machine gun fire while reconnoitering near Fort de Guise, he ignored painful wounds to crawl toward a German bunker. Intrepidly firing one bazooka round into the fortification and silencing a machine gun, he moved on to a defensive trench and launched a second round which destroyed another machine gun, killing or wounding the crew. Private Yuhas's gallant deeds permitted the patrol to withdraw from a desperate situation reflecting great credit on him and on the military service.*



**Joseph Le Flem**  
Silver Star Recipient  
22 Vones Lane

*For gallantry in action on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1944, in Italy. When his attacking platoon was halted by enemy machine gun fire from strong enemy positions, Private Le Flem, a rifleman, boldly exposed himself to the intense fire moving into enemy territory to engage them in a bitter firefight. Disregarding the extreme danger, he took up a firing position upon a point of vantage – and then by the accurate fire of his rifle, killed five and wounded others of the defending force. The remainder of the platoon inspired by his aggressive action, immediately attacked the enemy in force, successfully taking the objective. The aggressive and courageous action of Private Le Flem in seeking to engage the enemy despite the hazardous situation, reflects the highest traditions of the American Infantryman.*

**No photo  
Available**

Chester Gulick's citation for his Silver Star is not known. While he is one of the most decorated soldiers in Raritan history, information about him is, as we say, "lost to history".

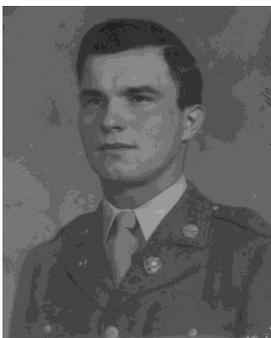
**Chester Gulick**  
Silver Star Recipient  
51 N. Cornell Blvd.

# Bronze Star Citations

There are two very different types of Bronze Stars. The majority of them are the “V” for Valor type -- which means that it was earned in combat. The other type was just a plain Bronze Star, without the “V”. These were awarded for logistic, organizational, and even clerical support to a unit that was in the battlefield. There was, and has always been, some controversy that these non-combat awards should be called something else. Although historians will often note that our war production, along with the logistics, and our organizational skills gave the U.S. soldier on the front line a tremendous competitive advantage. Therefore the support functions of the war should not be underestimated.



## “V” for Valor—Bronze Star



**Joseph L. Garo** – 88 Thompson Street

*A Bronze Star Medal is awarded to Sergeant Joseph L. Garo, who distinguished himself by meritorious service during the period from Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> to Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> 1944, in France. Sergeant Garo has done outstanding work as a Reconnaissance Sergeant. By his willingness to volunteer for hazardous tasks, he has proven himself to be a man of outstanding leadership. His reports from patrolling were always clear and concise and through his knowledge of reconnaissance, his reports contained the necessary elements of facts that headquarters desired. His devotion to duty and tireless energy is in accordance with the highest standards of military service.*

Joe Garo had a second act of heroism, which in adherence to military protocol, is added to his Bronze Star and called an Oak Leaf Cluster – that citation read:

*“He along with one other man entered the town under a flag of truce to convince the enemy that they were greatly outnumbered and to continue fighting was hopeless. He endangered his life to prevent any possible injury to the rest of the platoon. The total enemy in town was estimated at 50 with machine guns and light armor. These enemy soldiers could have taken many lives of our attacking force, but through his efforts, the town was taken without a shot being fired. His courage and devotion to duty is in accordance with the highest standards of military service.”*



**John Soriano** - 28 First Ave.

CITATION NOT KNOWN -

John was a gunner serving on a PT boat in the Pacific. He was on 50 patrols and 5 special missions in the New Guinea area. His entire PT boat squadron, as a unit, was highly decorated for destroying over 100 Japanese vessels and ravaging enemy shore installations on various islands in the South Pacific.

## “V” for Valor Bronze Star Citations (continued)



### **Louis Verci** (Luigi Vece) – 11 Loomis Street

*Private Luigi Vece was awarded the Bronze Star for heroic achievement in action on Dec. 21 1944, in Belgium. He and a group of his comrades were attacked by a large enemy force, supported by vehicles from which heavy caliber machine guns were firing. When a withdraw was considered expedient, Private Vece voluntarily remained behind to fire at the enemy until comrades had reached the new positions, and only then did he move back himself, firing as he went.*



### **Michael T. Terlizzi** – 79 First Avenue

*When his company was taken under intense enemy fire, Sergeant Terlizzi risked his life to set up his machine gun in an exposed position and bring fire on the enemy. He succeeded in killing and wounding a large number of them. And by diverting enemy fire in his own direction, he enabled his company to complete the preparation of a defensive position. The undaunted courage and devotion to duty which Sergeant Terlizzi displayed reflect the highest credit upon himself and military service.*



### **Dominick Cimino** - 33 Canal St.

He was with a medical unit attached to the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. (Citation paraphrased) For meritorious service in action against the enemy at Ormoc and Matagob, Phillipine Islands on December 13<sup>th</sup> and December 23rd 1944.

### **Edward J. Salek** – 32 N. Gaston Ave.

*For meritorious service in connection with military operations against the enemy near Urasoe-Mura, Okinawa, on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1945. When Company a of Infantry was sent forward to install its telephone. He reached the position the company was to occupy, but found his fellow troops had not yet arrived. Private Salek waited for hours, during which time he was under several intense enemy artillery mortal concentrations. He choose to remain at his post so that Company A could have communication with battalion headquarters when it arrived. His disregard for his own safety, and his obedience to orders were an inspiration to all.*

### **Charles Glens** – 82 First Avenue

With 77<sup>th</sup> infantry division on the island of Ie Shima on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945. *Approaching the Battalion dump, Sergeant Glens carriers were fired on by enemy 47 mm antitank guns. Realizing the urgent need for ammunition, he refused to disperse his vehicle to deflated positions, but ordered the convoy to continue through the enemy fire. He rode on the lead amtract without protection and pointed out lanes of travel to the driver. His persistence in accomplishing his mission contributed materially to the success of the attack.*

### **Frances Sipski** – 49 Frelinghuysen Avenue

899 field artillery battalion of the 75<sup>th</sup> division in Holland Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945

*Near Weert, Private Sipski and another field lineman made their way over 800 yards of open terrain, under enemy observation and machine gun crossfire to successfully repair communications wire broken by German mortar fire. The communications thus restored between a forward observer and the artillery batteries enabled fire to be accurately adjusted on enemy positions and materially aided in the defeat of a stubborn enemy. Private Sipski is deserving of high commendation for his courage and devotion in the face of enemy fire.*

### **John Pridala** – 5 Loomis Street

With 77<sup>th</sup> infantry in the Philippines. *Private Pridala, a rifleman, disregarding his own safety on several occasions helped to beat off enemy counter-attacks. On one occasion, he pushed ahead of friendly front lines and killed two enemy snipers who were harassing his squad. This act permitted his squad to move forward more rapidly. Private Pridala's coolness and level-headedness were an encouragement to the men of his squad.*

# Bronze Stars



PFC. EDWARD TAMMARO

## Edward Tammaro 69 W. Somerset St.

*For heroic achievement on Nov. 4th, 1944, near La Croce, Italy. When a man was seriously injured Pfc. Tammaro immediately left his place of cover to give aid to his helpless comrade. After carrying the injured man back to a foxhole Pfc. Tammaro noticed that his weapon had been damaged by enemy fire. He immediately set out for his command post to report the damaged gun and the position of the wounded man. Despite extreme shell fire, he refused to seek cover until he had made his report. Returning to his injured fellow soldier, Pfc. Tammaro quickly and skillfully gave him medical aid. Shortly thereafter Pfc. Tammaro was evacuated because of a severe concussion. His courage under fire and devotion to his comrade brought great credit on himself.*



## Rowland Koskamp 62 E. Somerset St

*For meritorious service in connection with operations against the enemy from July 29th to October 3rd in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany.*



## Anthony Carlino

CITATION NOT KNOWN  
27 Somerset St.



## Jos Ruggiero

63 Second Ave.

CITATION NOT KNOWN  
The newspaper said it was for meritorious service from April 5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. He told his family that "He was on a special mission to an undisclosed destination at that time."



## Eugene Bielawski

711 Bound Brook Ave.  
CITATION NOT KNOWN  
While serving with the Third Army in Europe



## Robert Krachun

86 First Ave.  
CITATION NOT KNOWN  
His story appears elsewhere in this book.

## George Gulick

48 Second Ave.

CITATION NOT KNOWN

## Dominick Orrechio

8 Sherman Ave.

CITATION NOT KNOWN

He served in Germany with a tank battalion. He worked in communications in the supply company. His unit fought as part of the 90<sup>th</sup> Division. They got into the fighting early in the battle for Europe, seeing action at Normandy and other battles.

## More Bronze Star Citations



### **Frank Russo** — 49 Anderson St.

*Sergeant Frank Russo ... for meritorious service in connection with military operations against the enemy from July 1944 through March 1945, in France, Holland, and Germany. Frank Russo rendered outstanding service ... on all occasions he displayed sound judgment and great calmness under fire. His great concern for the welfare of his men won him the praise of his superiors and the respect of his fellow soldiers.*



Frank was in a photograph with Winston Churchill. Photo on right.



### **Antonio Innamorato** — 4 Bell Ave. CITATION NOT KNOWN

The Innamorato Brothers from Raritan both were awarded Bronze Stars

### Non- "V" Bronze Stars



### **Cosimo Innamorato** — 4 Bell Ave.

*as member of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army in Europe. Sergeant (then Technician Fourth Grade), Corps of Engineers, Headquarters and Service Company, 649<sup>th</sup> Engineer Topographic Battalion, for meritorious service in direct support of combat operations from 19 August 1944 to 15 April 1945, in France and Germany. As Motor Sergeant in the Survey Platoon, Sergeant Innamorato kept his transportation equipment in excellent condition. Lack of vital repair parts did not deter him, for his thorough knowledge of his job and his ability to improvise parts overcame that difficulty whenever it arose. The successful functioning of the Survey Platoon in the field depended upon its mobility. Sergeant Innamorato assured the mobility. His high sense of duty and his successful achievement of his purpose reflected great credit on him and the Armed Forces of the United States.*



### **Philip Orlando** – 41 E. Somerset St.

*Sergeant, Division Headquarters, who distinguished himself by meritorious service in connection with military operations against the enemy on 18 June 1944 in France. Displaying his devotion to duty, aggressive initiative, and capacity for hard work and long hours, Sgt Orlando performed his duties as Journal Clerk in the G-3 Section in an outstanding manner. Although the Division was subjected to three fierce enemy counterattacks, Sgt Orlando's expert judgment, technical skill and personnel supervision contributed materially to the consistently efficient operation of his section. Sgt Orlando's actions were, at all times, exceptionally meritorious and worthy of commendation.*



### **Albert Navatto** – 4 West Somerset St.

Dec., 1944 – May., 1945 in France and Germany

*With outstanding initiative, leadership, and devotion to duty, Sergeant Navatto contributed immeasurably to the establishment and maintenance of the billets and messes for all officers and enlisted men of Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group. Due to the rapid movement of the headquarters, he was often required to work long and tiring hours in order to meet the allotted time schedule. By his remarkable ingenuity and ability to cope with unforeseen circumstances, He enabled the headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> army group to function successfully."*

## Bronze Star Photo Gallery



**Frank Russo, 1st on the right, appears in this photograph with Winston Churchill, who was meeting with troops on May 20th, 1944. This was in preparation of the invasion of Europe.**



**Albert Navatto receives The Bronze Star.**

## **John Hudak**

Three days after graduating from Somerville High School in 1944, John Hudak joined the Navy. His first stop was boot camp in Green Bay, Wisconsin, for 12 weeks of training. After that he was assigned to an amphibious unit that would be going to the Pacific Theater of War.

Their ship, the LSM-426, was christened and his unit on the brand-new ship was soon on their way to the Pacific. By Navy standards, this was a small ship which had a regular crew of 30 men. But there was room for equipment and other troops, as their primary function was to deliver men and machines to the battlefield. Their first stop was Pearl Harbor. After that it was Guam, Okinawa, Saipan & Eniwetok.

While they delivered their cargo before the battles began, danger was still present especially off the coast of Okinawa. John recalls his ship had several anxious moments when enemy aircraft were flying overhead.

Their ship performed a secondary purpose. While transporting men and equipment in a convoy they would lay down a trail of smoke to help camouflage them from enemy attack.

After a year of service in the war early in 1945 John Hudak was promoted to Coxswain.

John Hudak served as one of The Grand Marshalls of the 2009 Basilone Parade.

## **Gabriel Frangione**

Gabriel Frangione was born in Somerville, N.J. on September 7, 1923. He is the son of Italian immigrants from Salerno, Italy. Growing up, he lived in Somerville at 13 S. Doughty Avenue. (Today he lives in Raritan, right across from Frelinghuysen Park.) He graduated from Somerville High School in 1941.

On Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th, 1941, he was in attendance at a football game at The Polo Grounds in New York City. He realized that something had happened, as many announcements were made at the game asking for military personnel to return to their bases immediately. After the game, he found out that the Japanese had attacked the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

In February 1943, he volunteered and was inducted into the Army. His training was in engineering combat operations at Camp McCain, Mississippi. Then he was assigned to the Headquarters Unit of a Combat Engineering Division. He was responsible for the storage and logistics of building materials and munitions. At one point, his unit was informed that they were training for a special mission. That mission would turn out to be the invasion at Normandy, France. Today that invasion is known as D-Day.

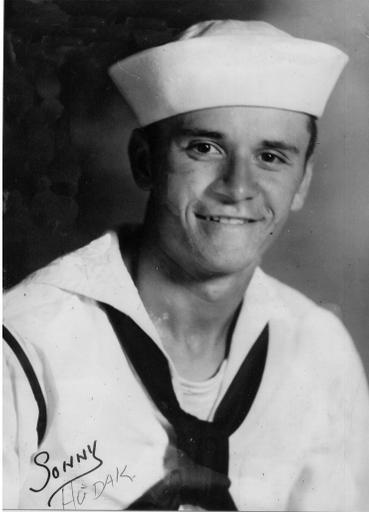
Gabriel's unit landed on the beaches at Normandy, toward the later part of the day, at Omaha Beach. Earlier in the day, the U.S. had suffered tremendous casualties in the initial landings. By the time that his unit arrived, the fighting was still intense, but the U.S. had begun to turn the tide of the battle. When they landed, the results of the earlier battle were all around them. There were scores of dead bodies floating in the water and plenty of damaged equipment. Gabriel and the other engineers were able to run from their landing craft to arrive safely in an area just off the beach. His engineering unit would organize and then help clear away some of the beach obstacles. At that time, the dead bodies and the carnage on the beach did not faze Gabriel, as he had a job to do. However, years later, these images would come to haunt him.

Today, he says the true heroes at Omaha Beach were the guys who gave their lives. He wants the families of these fallen soldiers to know that. After the invasion at Normandy the Allies quickly advanced across Europe for the final defeat of Nazi Germany.

Gabriel Frangione was the Grand Marshall of the 2010 Basilone Parade.

# Raritan's World War II Profiles

## John Hudak

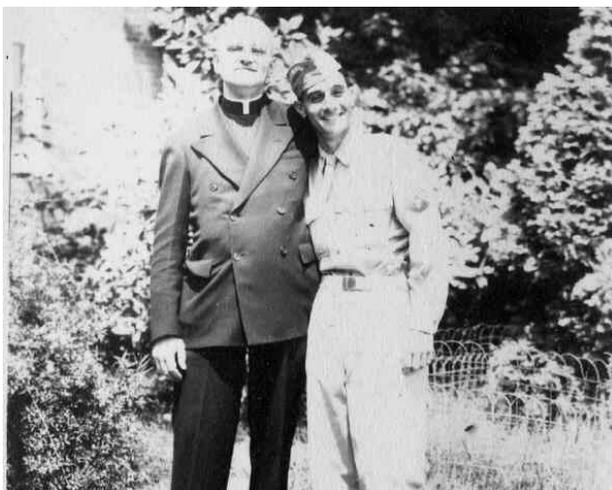


His ship delivered men and supplies to the front. There were many anxious moments as enemy planes were often flying above them.

## Gabriel Frangione



He would storm the beaches at Normandy France, on D-Day, June 6th, 1944.



Here Gabriel poses with Father Graham of Somerville. Father Graham was very active on the homefront during the war.



Here Gabriel is with a family that he made friends with in Belgium.

## Joe Kovac

Joe Kovac served in the U.S. Navy, aboard the *USS Suwannee* — a small aircraft carrier that saw action in many battles, including Guadalcanal, North Africa, Tarawa, and Leyte Gulf. Aboard the ship, Joe had two jobs; one was in the logistics of moving aircraft between the flight deck and the hanger deck. His other job was repairing the aircraft in the “Metal Shop”.

In October of 1942, the *USS Suwannee* participated in the long-heralded second front, the invasion of Africa – in the vicinity of Casablanca. The ship’s job was to support the huge amphibious landing force as they hit the beach. They did that and more, as one of the dive bombers from the ship sank an enemy submarine. After that battle, the *USS Suwannee* set sail for the Pacific to engage the Japanese at Guadalcanal. There they again provided air support for the landing of additional troops and equipment.

Joe Kovac recalls that during these battles, most of the planes that had been launched from The *USS Suwannee* would return. However, a few times during the more intense battles, some planes did not return. When this happened, the onboard crew would hope that the missing men had been recovered at sea by one of the other U.S. ships. Sometimes the missing men were found and brought back to the ship, but other times they were never heard from again.

After the battle at Guadalcanal, the *USS Suwannee* returned to the U.S. for supplies. During this time Joe was able to get leave and come home to Raritan. As fate would have it, this was the week of The John Basilone Welcome Home Parade. Joe Kovac recalled the large crowd that came to Raritan. He especially remembers how beautiful the movie stars Louise Albritton and Virginia O’Brien (who rode in the parade) were.

At the end of October 1943, the *USS Suwannee* headed out to the Pacific again to join other ships to do battle in the invasion of Tarawa. This was the first step in the next phase of the war. The U.S. now needed to capture islands that were held firmly by entrenched Japanese defenders. In early November 1943, the U.S. Forces arrived at the outskirts of the Island of Tarawa. In the early morning of November 20<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. unleashed a tremendous naval bombardment which lasted several hours. Then they began invading the island. During the invasion (and even before it) planes from the *USS Suwannee* bombed and strafed Japanese emplacements. They also flew air patrols to gather information that would be used in the attack.

After Tarawa, in the Spring/Summer of 1944, the *USS Suwannee* moved across the Pacific participating in the initial landings in the battles at the islands of Palau, Saipan, and Guam.

In Joe Kovac’s closest brush with death, luck spared him and his shipmates. During one battle in the Pacific, a Japanese torpedo plane was able to avoid anti-aircraft fire and drop a torpedo in the water around one hundred yards before the *USS Suwannee*. With the Japanese plane traveling much faster than the torpedo, the plane came upon the ship first, flying just a few feet over the flight deck. Joe Kovac, who was on the flight deck, recalled that the Japanese pilot opened his mouth to taunt the Americans as he expected the torpedo to explode against the ship in just a few seconds. However, the look on the face of the enemy pilot must have surely changed from one of gloating to one of disappointment as the torpedo was a dud – it bounced off the side of the ship. Today Joe says of the Japanese pilot, “The pilot was so close to me that I could have reached out and shoved an apple in his mouth”. Joe served as The Grand Marshall of The Basilone Parade in 2011.

## James Sorace

A hard worker, James was a licensed barber by the time he was 16. When he was 17, on one cold Sunday afternoon, he went to New York City to see The Woody Herman Orchestra at the Strand Theatre. In the middle of the concert, the music stopped and an announcer came on to say that the U.S. had just been attacked by the Japanese. He further added that service personnel from a Navy ship that had been docked in New York Harbor were told to report back to their ship immediately. The band then resumed playing to the stunned crowd. That day was December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941. James realized that his life and those around him would no longer be the same. Less than a year later, when he turned 18, James joined the Navy to defend his country. He remembers the day he enlisted. He and three other guys went to enlist together. For Raritan boys to join the service, the first stop was the Somerville Post Office, which staffed recruiters on particular days. From Somerville they were put on a bus to New Brunswick — and from there a train took them to New York City.

When the Navy asked James what his skills were, he told them that he was a licensed barber. However, he explained that was not what he joined for. Yet, when the officers gave him the assignment as a barber on a navy ship, he gladly accepted it. After basic training, he was assigned to a ship, The *USS Oakland*. While it was classified as a “light” cruiser, it packed a tremendous punch, as the ship was able to bomb islands from miles away with its many large guns. There were 800 men aboard.

The *USS Oakland* has a place in the history of World War II, in that it saw action at so many islands that are still remembered today. They include Guam, Okinawa, Truk, Leyte Gulf, Gilbert Islands, Formosa, and the Marshall Islands. During any fighting the barber shop closed. James’s duty was then changed to an “ammunition passer”. When firing away, the sounds of the guns was deafening. Today, James wears hearing aids. He attributes the need for them to have been caused by these bombardments.

The most significant historic event that James and the crew were present at was a peaceful event. For the *U.S.S. Oakland* was anchored next to The *U.S.S. Missouri* on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, for the historic signing of the peace treaty which ended the war. Many famous photographs were taken at this event which was overseen by General Douglas MacArthur. After the signing of the peace agreement, James along with thousands of other military personal, were assigned duty in the occupation of Japan. James recalled how devastated Japan was. The airplane bombing had flattened the city of Tokyo. A surprise to the soldiers was that the Japanese people were very friendly. Was this the race that had fought so savagely in battle?

After a short stay in Japan, James received orders to return home. He decided to surprise his family. His ship let him off in San Francisco and then the long journey back to Raritan started with a three-day train ride to New York City. From there, he took a train to Raritan. He remembers walking from the train station to their home, which was now at 24 Doughty Street. He walked in to two very surprised, overjoyed, and proud parents. James had returned home after three years of defending freedom. He had served his country well, brought home several medals, and had many stories to tell. James would open his own barber shop on Somerset Street in Raritan in 1947—The J&J Barbershop. It is still open today, with his son, James Jr. managing the business. In 2006, James Sorace served as the Grand Marshall of the Basilone Parade.

# Raritan's World War II Profiles

## Joe Kovac

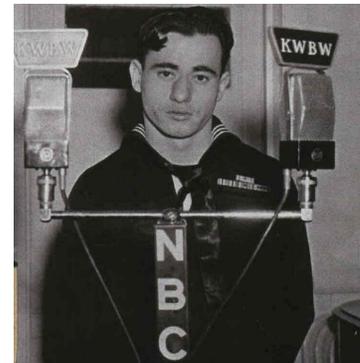


In front of his home at  
73 Anderson Street

One night toward the end of the war, while he was stationed in Kansas, Joe Kovac attended a USO dance that was held for servicemen. The organizers of the dance must have found this young sailor quite charming. They named him the dance's official "King of Hearts". They then put him on an NBC radio show, where he told about his experience in the war.



*USS Suwannee*



## James Sorace



His ship saw action in many battles, including Guam, Okinawa, Truk, Leyte Gulf, Gilbert Islands, Formosa, and the Marshall Islands



## Gene Moretti

Gene was born in 1917, residing at 7 Doughty Street in Raritan. As a young boy, he went to the Raritan Public Schools, which were on the property where the Municipal Building is today. He attended St. Ann's Church where he served as an altar boy. When he was 11, his family moved to Somerville. With the start of World War II, both Gene and his brother Joseph volunteered to serve their country. His brother Joseph joined the Navy and Gene the Army. After a sendoff dinner at Orlando's Restaurant in Raritan, he was sent to Fort McClellan for training.

In November of 1942, his unit took part in the first U.S. invasion of enemy territory (known as Operation Torch) when they landed at Casablanca, Morocco. After that, the troops were re-supplied and began a long trek across Northern Africa, battling the Germans.

At this time Gene was assigned to an armored division. He rode along with the convoy of tanks in a truck that contained supplies for the tanks. Gene was assigned to a mounted machine gun that was in the front passenger side of the supply truck. That weapon would be fired many times at the enemy. While he personally was never hit, the tanks in his outfit were often hit. The tanks used gasoline for fuel and as a result, burst into flames when hit. He, along with others, had to try and get the severely injured and often badly burnt men out of the tank, to give them a chance of surviving. This was one of the toughest things he had to do during the war.

After taking North Africa from the Germans, they would participate in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943 (Sicily is an island off mainland Italy) On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1944, the U.S. Army had advanced to the outskirts of Rome. Here the U.S. outnumbered the Germans, thus the Germans decided to abandon the city without a fight. Gene recalled that when they drove into Rome, the Germans, just 200 yards away, were driving out. Neither side fired on one another as an unofficial temporary ceasefire agreement seemed to have arisen between the two opposing sides. Along the journey, the U.S. Army, at times stopped to rest and regroup. When they did, the soldiers often got to know the civilian population. The U.S. were liberators, thus for the most part, they were warmly welcomed. Gene said that while the other soldiers spent a lot of their free time drinking in any tavern they could find, he chose to spend a lot of his time socializing with the local people. Gene became good friends with some families.

Germany would surrender at the beginning of May, 1945. That would end the fighting portion of the war in Europe. At this point, Gene's unit was in the town of Livorno, Italy. He would remain there, assigned to a desk job, in a temporary U.S. Headquarters building. Working in that office was a young, local Italian girl named Maria who spoke English. He found her charming and he would begin to see her outside of work. However, in November of 1945, he was given orders to return home. Maria said to Gene before he left "You are coming back for me." He asked her "How can you be sure?" Maria responded, "Because I have your heart." She was indeed correct, as in 1947 Gene, after keeping in touch with her for 18 months, returned to Italy to marry her. They then came back to the U.S., where a party was held in their honor. Today in 2014, 66 years later, they are still married!

Gene is The Grand Marshall of the 2014 Basilone Parade.

## Joe Sian 1919 — 2013

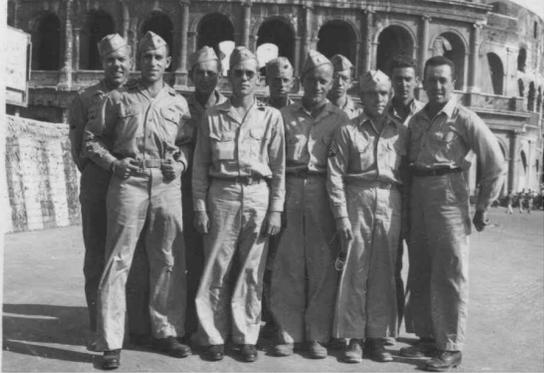
Joe served in the Navy during World War II on *The USS Pasadena*. Aboard the ship, Joe was a "radioman". He operated the telegraph machine, deciphering and sending messages in the control room in Morse Code.

His ship bombed *Iwo Jima* before the U.S. Invasion on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Joe said that the sound of the dozens of ships bombing that island was simply incredible. It was unlike anything he has ever heard. He noticed how the Japs were well dug-in underground. He saw that the U.S. could heavily bomb a particular location and then when the gun was re-aimed to another location, the Japs would return to the previous bombed out location and begin returning fire.

*The USS Pasadena* was anchored next to *The USS Missouri* at the historic signing of the Japanese Surrender, in September of 1945. After the surrender of Japan, Joe Sian was assigned to the occupation of Tokyo. The city was mostly destroyed, as 80% of the buildings were damaged. The desperate residents of Tokyo were reduced to going through the garbage of the U.S. ships to look for food. One horrible part of their ordeal was the number of Japanese women who were reduced to prostitution. Joe remembers how it was common for an older Japanese woman to solicit customers for a younger Japanese girl. Often this was the mother marketing her daughter, who was sometimes as young as 14, in an attempt to raise money to buy food for that day. The going rate for sex was just one "U.S." dollar. Joe, with two young daughters at home, found this very disturbing. He felt sorry for the Japanese, but he was careful not to share his feelings with too many others, as the memory of Pearl Harbor left many unsympathetic to the suffering of the Japanese. Joe was one of the Grand Marshalls of the Basilone Parade in 2009. Joe passed away in 2013.

# Raritan's World War II Profiles

## Gene Moretti



Along his journey, he saw many famous places. That is the Roman Coliseum in the background.

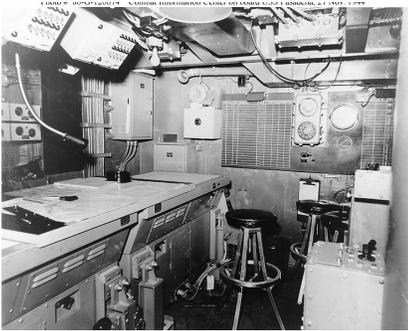


Gene with his brother Joseph. Joseph Moretti was killed in the war when a kamikaze hit his ship *The USS Bunker Hill*.



When the war ended in Italy, Gene was assigned to a headquarters job in Livorno, Italy. In the office he met an Italian girl, Maria, that he would later marry.

## Joe Sian



Joe was a radioman. Above is the radio room on the ship.



*The USS Pasadena*



The *USS Pasadena* bombed Iwo Jima just before the invasion.



Joe saw first-hand the destruction of Japan



Joe's ship was docked next to *The USS Missouri* for the signing of the peace treaty that ended the war.

## Dominic Porcaro 1922—2012

During World War II, Dominic Porcaro served in the Navy on an escort ship (the PC-542) that patrolled in the Mediterranean Sea. While this was a small ship by World War II standards, just 180 feet long with 73 men serving on board, it was heavily armored. His ship escorted supply ships (called Liberty Ships) and troop-transport ships throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Duty on a ship like the PC-542 was a very uncomfortable tour at sea. The ship, at times, rode like a roller-coaster. Often, a significant percentage of the sailors were seasick. In addition to its rough ride, all areas of the ship were very cramped. Dominic was a diesel mechanic who made sure that the ship's engines were operating smoothly. During battle, Dominic manned the guns. Their ship took part in four major invasions. The first was the invasion of Sicily.

On June 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the U.S. made their first invasion into enemy territory in Europe during World War II, landing on the beaches of Sicily. (Sicily is an island just off the coast of Italy.) During the invasion, his ship coordinated the movement of landing craft. They gave color signals to the various landing crafts (Higgins boats) to direct them to land on the correct beach at the correct time. This task was a little hectic as it was the middle of the night, there were several beaches, many landing craft, and one major distraction — the enemy was trying to kill them. Since the invasion was at night, the cloak of darkness was a major advantage. However, once the landings began, enemy searchlights were shining at them from the heavily defended beaches. One of the lights found the small ship and lit it up for several seconds. They thought an accurate bomb might follow, but fortunately, it did not. For the invasion, the U.S. had many battleships just offshore with heavy accurate guns. After many minutes of the enemy search lights illuminating them in the water, the U.S. battleships accurately bombarded the powerful searchlights, allowing the invasion to proceed in darkness.

Their boat would be fired on during the battle, which took several hours, but fortunately the bombs landed in the water. With the dawn, the sailors saw some of the landing craft returning back to the larger ships. One passed near their ship. Two dead U.S. soldiers could be seen. Yes, this was war. During the nighttime they saw and heard the bombs and explosions, but now, seeing the dead bodies of their fallen comrades in the calm of day made the war seem more personal.

The PC-542 would give support for three other troop landings in Italy.

Dominic had several thoughts and stories about the war. To sum it all up, he simply said: “War is terrible, people do not realize it.” He was grateful to have returned from the war. While serving, he had doubts that he would survive, as danger was always lurking. Dominic passed away just before he was to ride in the 2012 Basilone Parade as Grand Marshall.

## Angelo Bernabe 1923 — 2008

Angelo attended Somerville High School — graduating in 1943. With World War II in progress, he joined the Army that same year — training at Camp Kilmer in New Brunswick. Camp Kilmer was located where the Livingston section of the Rutgers campus is today. The war years were a time of uncertainty in our country. Thus, before a young man went overseas into battle, he would often marry his girlfriend in order to hold onto something at home. Angelo had met his girlfriend Marie in high school. They dated for a year-and-a-half. Knowing that he was soon headed overseas, on August 14th, 1944, they married. Many of these “wartime marriages” did not last after the man returned home from the war. However, Angelo and Marie Bernabe stayed married for over sixty years.

While Angelo was training stateside, significant events were happening in the war. The Allies (the U.S. & Britain) had begun their invasion on June 6th, 1944, (D-Day) on the beaches of Normandy, France. After the landing, they moved across Europe to finish off the enemy, Nazi Germany. For this task, many additional brave men would be needed. Angelo Bernabe was one of them.

Angelo was shipped overseas in January of 1945. He joined the fight as soon as he arrived — moving across Europe toward Germany with the Army. He initially was assigned to an artillery section which fired heavy shells at specific targets a few miles away. They aimed for troop positions and enemy strongholds in buildings. As they moved forward, they had many difficult encounters with the Germans. One was at the end of March, when they first crossed the Rhine River, which is near the western border of Germany. They crossed the river on special temporary makeshift bridges that were assembled by the Allied engineers. Angelo remembers they crossed at midnight under dangerous conditions, as they were being harassed by the German Air Force. When later asked if he was scared in combat, Angelo said “if any man tells you he is not scared, he is lying.”

Then they continued across Germany toward Berlin. During the advance toward Germany, Angelo was reassigned to ride in a tank. His position was a loader of ammunition. He had not been trained for tank duty, but he quickly assumed his new assignment. Five men were packed inside an American Sherman tank. This was dangerous duty. The enemy's tank, the German Panzer, was superior to the American tank. The German Panzers had more firepower and could often withstand hits from heavy artillery. Soldiers have said that it took 2 or 3 American tanks to go up against 1 German tank. After crossing hundreds of miles in a few weeks and seeing combat along the way, they came up on the edge of the Elbe River, which is close to Berlin. Around the river was where the Germans set up their strongest defenses. On April 22nd, 1945, Angelo's tank was hit. He would wake up in the hospital in England two days later, with no memories of the blast. He found he had head and back injuries. There was also shrapnel in his arm that would require surgery.

Back on the homefront, his new bride Marie was staying with her parents in Somerville. A telegram was sent to her from the War Department. The telegram said Angelo was “seriously wounded”. They were thankful he was alive, but the wording “seriously” could have many terrible meanings. It left them praying and wondering anxiously for more details. The next information would not arrive for a couple of weeks. Angelo was too badly wounded to write home initially, but as soon as he could, he wrote home, telling them that while he had sustained some injuries, he would recover. For his injuries, he was awarded The Purple Heart. Angelo Bernabe served as the Grand Marshall of the Basilone Parade in 2008. He passed away a few months after that.

# Raritan's World War II Profiles

## Dominick Porcaro

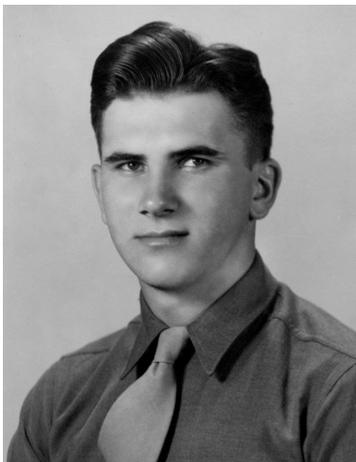


*“War is terrible, people do not realize it.”*



This photo of 4 Raritan guys appeared in *The Raritan Valley News*. Left to right: John Rossi, Armi Salerno, Dominic Porcaro, and Steve Sabol.

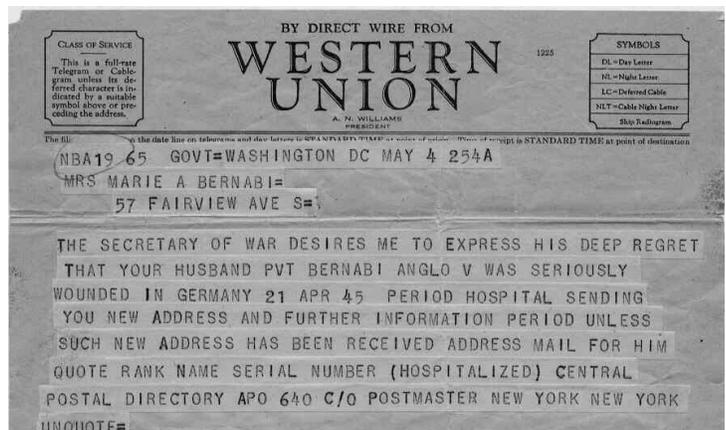
## Angelo Bernabe



**“If any man tells you he is not scared in combat, he is lying.”**



Marie and Angelo



# Closing

Writing this book has been a wonderful experience. I would like to thank my historical consultants, John Pacifico and Peter Vitelli, who share my passion for local history. I must admit that they have a big advantage over me in local history, as they were there and I was not.

It was fortunate to have the perfect editor — Bob McClement — he is a professional writer, a history buff, and a good friend.

I would like to thank Wendy and Dave at the newspaper *The Breeze*. Much of the content in this book first appeared as articles in their paper. They felt that heroic war stories should appear prominently — thus most of the articles were put on the front page.

It was an honor to be able to interview the local World War II veterans: Michael DeCicco, James Sorace, Robert Krachun, Angelo Bernabe, Joe Kovac, Joe Sian, John Hudak, Gabriel Frangione, Dominic Porcaro, and Gene Moretti.

I must thank Joyce Valeri Walker, who gave me the photos of the 1942 Memorial Day event that her 1st-grade class held. Karen Jane Bables, the daughter of Rowland Koskamp, provided me with much information. The Del Rocco family – Steve Sr., Steve Jr., and Anna — gladly sat down with me.

My most unforgettable interview was with Berardino and Letizia DiGiacomantonio. I hinged on their every word as they described how they helped soldiers escape the Nazis at great risk to their own lives. They are incredible people.

Cathy and Cindy Musz and I had an amazing journey together. First, we traced their dad's story through his scrapbook and letters. We never dreamed that we would meet with the family that their dad met in Belgium during the war — but we did. I still remember the moment I received a letter back from Belgium, letting us know that we had found the right family.

Thanks to Ann Orlando Schaub for lending me hundreds of letters her dad Tony Orlando had received.

I was thrilled when Eric Jacobs called me with a photo of a Raritan soldier (his Uncle Frank Russo) with Winston Churchill.

Also thanks to The Raritan Library, The Bridgewater Library, Anthony DeCicco, Irene Sixt, Joseph Frelinghuysen II, Al Capetta, Mr & Mrs. Pat Mastice, Catherine Mastice, Joan Rudloff Orlando — the daughter of Philip Orlando, Al Gaburo Jr., Mrs. Joe Garo, Jeff Krachun, Carl Montgomery, Rose Sansone, Tony Hudak, Ron Rispoli, Mike Lowey, Estievenart Family of Belgium, Ann Navatto and Jo-Ann Liptak.

And finally to the men and women who served in the epic conflict — great job — you are indeed — The Greatest Generation.

To the 24 Raritan men who gave their life for our country — we owe you more than words can express.

For more information and photos on Raritan's World War II history visit [www.raritan-online.com](http://www.raritan-online.com).

If anyone has any Raritan photos (or telegrams) from World War II, please share them with us as we will put them on the internet for everyone to see.

We especially could use photos or family contact information for:  
Walter Jacobs (KIA), Charles Dougherty (KIA), Alfred Zanoni (KIA), John Gentile (KIA),  
Chester Gulick (Silver Star), Robert Yuhas (Silver Star), and Kaye Russell (USO).

This author's email is [bdoorly@verizon.net](mailto:bdoorly@verizon.net)

# AGWAY is Proud to be the Sponsor of *Raritan's Finest Hour—The Story of Raritan During World War II*

Agway Owner Jeff Krachun's dad, Robert, served with honors during World War II—earning The Bronze Star. Robert saw combat as his unit fought across Europe against the Germans.

After the war ended he served as a guard at The Nuremberg Trials. At times he guarded the top surviving Nazi Hermann Goring.



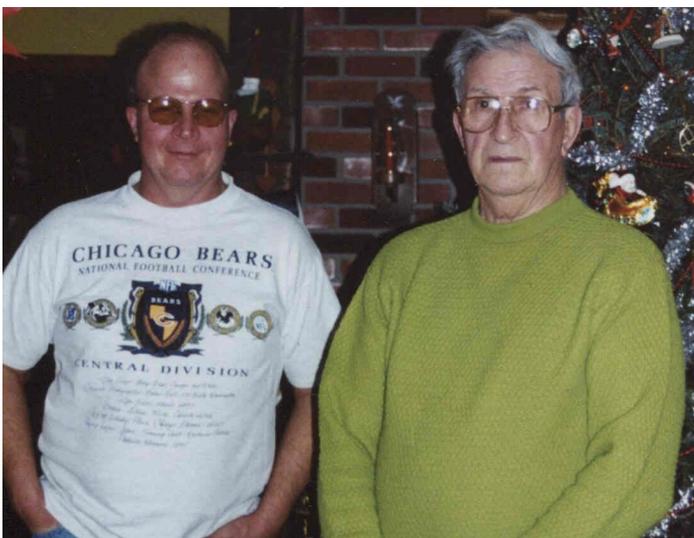
Robert Krachun



Robert Krachun's ID card from The Nuremberg Trials



Here Robert Krachun and his buddies give a mock salute on the balcony at Nuremberg Stadium. On this balcony Hitler made some of his famous speeches.



Jeff Krachun and his dad Robert



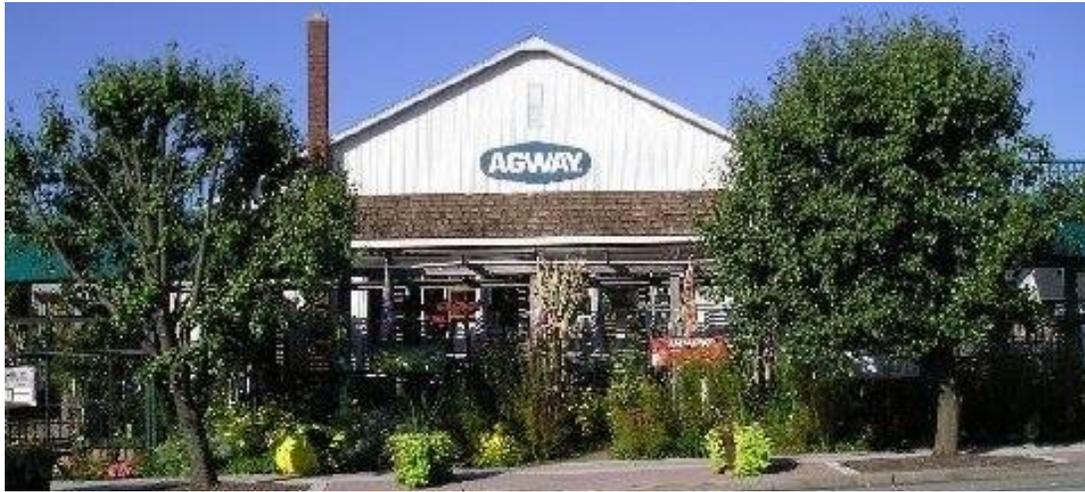
NUREMBERG Courtroom Scene shows "Fatso" Goering and Rudolph Hess. MP in white helmet to the left behind Goering is PFC Robert Krachun of First Ave. Three civilians are Nazi war criminals.

The Raritan Valley News Dec. 1945



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